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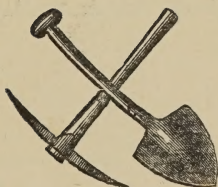
TALES  
OF THE  
KLONDYKE



# TALES OF THE KLONDYKE

BY

T. MULLETT ELLIS



TORONTO  
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## NOTE

*Several of the following Stories were  
originally told in To-Day.*

DEDICATION

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TO

ELVIRA

THE CONSTANT COMPANION OF MY HOURS  
ON THE KLONDYKE

T. M. E.

CREEK HOUSE, SHEPPERTON-ON-THAMES,  
*January 1898.*





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# TALES OF THE KLONDYKE

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## CHAPTER    *'OW DAVID SMITH AND ME* FIRST        *DISCOVERED KLONDYKE*

**T**HE boom! Yes. Klondyke's a boom now. The only mystery to me is, 'ow we kep' it secret so long.

Why, it's more than six—seven—why, blowed if it ain't eleven years ago! It was in '87 thet I diskivered Klondyke—leastways, David Smith and me.

David Smith 'ad done pretty well everythink 'e 'adn't oughter—includin' time. Seven years' hard at Portland was only a bit of it. He'd done a bit o' soldierin', an' a bit o' navigatin', an' a bit o' mining. Gawd only knows wot 'e 'adn't done a bit of! I doan' quite like to talk of it, but trewly 'e done a murder or two which 'adn't counted. Yes, he had thet!

A pal of mine! Wal, you kin call 'im a pal if you like. I'm not goin' to round on 'im now. 'E was a good pal to me. Anyway,



he was with me in British Columbia, and nobody but him and me and Injuns for a hundred miles around.

It was like this we met. We was out arter fur. I am a pure Cockney, I am — leastways, I was afore I went out West. At fust I didn't think no great shakes of Canada. But I cayn't breathe in towns now. The bully mountains for me! The Rockies for choice! Wal, I was a-sayin', we was out arter fur. We was four, all told. One was left sick at Odinothka, and the three of us went on. The other two and me had a quarrel, an' we parted. So I was left absolutely alone. I went to the nearest place there was, sixty mile away. Selkirk was its name. I went into a bar. There was only one, an' that's where I met David.

'E was a-sittin' thar by 'isself, an' w'en I come in, 'e ses: "Stranger," 'e ses, "'ave a drink?"

"It's wot I've come in 'ere to get," ses I.

Wal, we had another and another, and some more arter thet, and from thet hour to the day 'e went 'ome, David Smith and me was pardners—true pardners for life.

'E was by 'isself, and I was by myself. 'E was arter fur and I was arter fur, so it was we became pals.

I didn't know at fust what a bad lot he was. We was together for months afore I know'd he'd done time—an' wuss. Ah! but wot a

heart he had, poor old Dave Smith! The best pal, the very best tarnation pal I ever 'ad, David was!

We got on tidy wal together from the fust, considering my temper, which ain't honey—not by no manner of means. I used to slang David at the beginning, an' almost came to blows once or twice. But 'e 'ad a patient way with him, and w'en we got to know each other's ways, we jogged along as easy as a man and a barrer. We was more than pals. We was pardners, Dave Smith and me was.

Wal, we got a good bit of fur — nice skins too. Dave was a better shot than me—though I reckon I kin shoot. We made eleven thousand dollars between us in three months, wot with our two guns, and a bit o' traffic we 'ad with the Injuns, sho! Thet was so. Dave was the boy to traffic. Gosh! He could deal, that could David! Bargain! Ah! the 'ardest and cleverest 'ead at a chop I ever knowed. 'E was so!

The season was gettin' on, when I 'ad some bad luck. I got ill. I 'ad to lay up with nothink to shelter me but a 'ole in the rock—still, a cave and furs in plenty is cosier than you may think, you folks in the Old Country; an' then it was I learnt two things, w'en I was ill, I did. I learnt as 'ow my pal and pardner, David

Smith, was a convic', and I learnt as 'ow there's a spark o' the Divine—aye, and a deal o' the kindliness of human natur'—even in the breast of a man wot's been convicted of a crime.

I was that ill—wal, no need to describe iv'ry shiver that come into my bones. I was cold as an icicle. David Smith made me warm. The tears froze on my cheeks. David Smith kissed 'em away. Ah! yew don't understand what it is to be a thousand miles away from yewr fellow-creatures, in a land where the ice is a foot thick; where the winds bite like dogs, and the very stars shine cold! We two was all the world to each other. Wal, I had delicacies. I had gruel; I had delicious soup; I had bear jelly; wild-duck, cooked as dainty as any invalid ivver tasted, for David Smith could do anythink with 'is fingers, an' a'most anything with 'is 'ead. But I was powerful bad, and oftens couldn't eat—no, not nothink at all, for all the care Dave took to make nice dishes for me. Encourage me howsomever he would, I couldn't eat, an' I grew that cold—ugh! I shudder w'en I thinks of it.

Still, all the time w'en I was betwix' life and death—as the sayin' is—David was as kind as a woman to me. There ain't none too much fuel in the Rockies, but Dave found plenty for me. 'E must 'ave slaved 'ard to git the



big logs 'e brought up to our cave. Night an' day 'e kep' a reg'lar bonfire goin', and but for 'im and the fires 'e made, I shouldn't be 'ere a-tellin' yew 'ow we discovered Klondyke.

The districk where we was is a blank on this 'ere map. They calls it British Columbia, but it was just the wildest country yew ivver see. It was south of the Porcupine branch of the Yukon; it was south of Jigger's Gulch—not azackly in the Rockies, nor yet not out of 'em, but in a sort of a way 'alf in the 'ills and 'alf in the plains, but the whole of it set to cop the full whiff of all the four blarsted winds that ivver blew. That's the Klondyke, as they calls it now. D'ye 'ear? — the Klondyke—an' a one-hoss place it is.

“It's as bleak as the North Pole,” ses I to Dave one day, when I was a-gettin' better, “and as raw as the 'ighest pint on the Rockies.”

“It's none so cold or raw as it used to be at Portland,” ses Dave. 'E bit his lip as soon as ivver 'e said it. Then I marked 'im look at me cautious out o' the tail of 'is eye, an' then he looks away.

So I thinks, 'an I thinks again, an' one or two funny things that I'd seed David a-doin' of, an' that I'd 'eard 'im say forgetful—includin' summat 'e let drop about the Stone Jug—occurred to me. So I puts two an' two together,

an' it all come to me like a revelation. By this time I could sit up a bit.

Wal, I puts my 'and on 'is, an' I ses: "Dave," I ses, "Gawd knows, there's many a villain in Portland, an' many an honest man. Whichever you are," I ses, "or a bit of both, David, it may be, by Gawd yew're a true man to me," I ses; "an' there's my 'and, David Smith. You're better pardner to me than my own brother," I ses. "It may be I'm a dying man. But for yew I should be dead. Yew can trust me through an' through. So long as there's a ghost of a breath in me, I'll be a true pal to yew, David Smith, come what may," an' I shook 'is 'and.

Wal, he tells me all 'is story—the sad, wild story of 'is life. Forgery and theft—aye, and murders too—was in it. It was a shocking thing to 'ear 'im tell, an' I ses, wonderful solemn: "David," I ses, "Gawd is a-listenin' to me and yew. Git down upon yewr knees."

'E looks at me very funny an' suspicious out o' the tail of 'is eye, but I takes 'is 'and again in mine, and down I goes on my knees—he doin' of the same through me a-draggin' of 'im, an' there we kneels side by side.

P'raps for a 'undred square miles around, all in them rugged peaks, there wayn't no other human beings to look at but us two. Peaks! Wal, there was peaks all above us, but we

was down in the gulch. In the gulch us two was all alone together in the quiet—all alone with Gawd in the silence.

I don't know azackly what I ses, but my spirit seemed to be a-lifted up, an' I flings my arms up to Gawd, who was a-listenin', I tell yer. I knowed 'E was a-listenin'. Bits o' the collicks, an' the litany, an' scraps o' the old prayers wot we used to say in church at 'ome, all got mixed up together with "miserable sinners," an' all them pious words which I'd almost forgot, though I'd heard 'em in 'Frisco, turned wrong side up; an' w'en I looks at David Smith, blowed if he wayn't bowed down all of a heap and a-blubberin' like a baby!

. . . . .

Dave an' me was truer pals than ivver arter that.

In not no long time I took to my feet again, an' got to 'andlin' my rifle, an' soon I gits an appetite, an' picks up wonderful.

So we left that there cave. Seven weeks I was there, nearer death than I shall ever be again—bar one.

"Now, we'll git back to Selkirk," ses Dave—for I was still weak on my pins, an' a touch of the scurvy comin' on.

So we sets off, not over the rocks, but down towards the valley.

It was easier climbin' in the high lands, but lower down it wayn't so bleak. Yet, what with avoidin' boulders and goin' through beach, an' wading rivers, we should 'ave got on quicker atop the table-land, for all there was snow.

But if we had, hist'ry would 'ave been different, 'cos, mark yer, the gold of British Columbia is goin' to revolutionise the whole world. An' that's wot we was a-findin' of—the gold of British Columbia, though we wasn't so much as even a-lookin' for it, mind yer. No—nor even dreamin' of lookin' for it, w'en we come plump upon it, unbeknown.

Wot we found down in the valley was this. Yes, I wears it 'ere in my pin. That's the first bit o' gold found in Klondyke. It's only a little nugget, ain't it? Wal, I jest keeps that for my necktie. Pretty, eh?

It was Dave wot found it. 'E says: "Strike me!" says 'e. "Wot's this 'ere?" An' 'e jumps in the air like a madman. In a jiffy 'e was down on 'is belly, washin' of it in the stream. Nex' moment 'e gits it in his teeth a-bitin' of it. Then he slaps me on the back, fit to break me in 'alf. "It's gold!" 'e says. "I tell yer, mate, it's gold!" An', 'e falls a-laughin'.

A minit arter that 'e looks at 'is feet. "This 'ere is pay dirt we're a-treadin' on," 'e ses

very solemn. Then 'e cocks 'is eye around up an' down the valley. "There's a lot of it," he ses. Then he looks up at the mountain ranges. "I don't see no quartz," 'e ses, kinder disappointed like. Then 'e looks at wot we was a-walkin' in, an' fallin' down on 'is 'ands an' knees, began to scratch up the ground like a dawg arter a rat. Wal, I stood a-watchin' of 'im, an' soon he strides off to the stream again with both his hands full o' dirt, and 'e washes it mighty particular and slow. Then 'e waves to me, lookin' around as though 'e was fair dazed.

"Pardner," ses 'e, "look! These little specks is gold," 'e ses.

"They're so bloomin' small, I can't hardly not see 'em," I ses, kinder sneerin' at 'im.

"Oh, no, they ain't!" 'e ses. "All these little specks, matey, will shake up to a lot. This is only a little handful, pardner, and there's hundreds of miles of the stuff." An' again 'e looks around. "'Undreds of miles!"

With that I falls on my knees too, and I scoops up a 'andful, and lor! there was a bully nugget the size of a kidney bean, shining like a little light'ouse in the palm of my 'and.

"Strike me lucky!" 'e ses, 'is eyes aglittering; "Mate! Gold! Gold! Gold!! Gold!!! An' 'e sits down on the ground, an'



chucks 'is legs in the air, well nigh a-standin' on 'is 'ead.

Well, then, I sets down too, an' mighty solemn I feels, pinchin' 'ard 'old of the nugget wot I 'ad in my 'and—as big as a hegg it were. It wayn't the nugget—I soon forgets that, but my eyes was a-rovin' an' a-rovin' over the miles and miles of pay dirt all around; an' besides, there was David, with 'is eyes full of a glitterin', unnatural light, starin' at the 'ills.

It was the 'ills I was a-thinkin' of too, 'cos there wos where the gold wos washed from—the 'ills where I knowed the gold lay solid. That's wot David was thinkin' of an' all.

We gave up goin' arter fur, in coorse, an' off we went right away to Selkirk. But jest afore we gets to ole Jake's store, I feels David's 'and acrost my face, a-holdin' of my jaw. An' 'e got 'is mouth to my ear, a-hissin' out this 'ere threat. "Pardner," 'e ses; "yew jis' say one word of our find—yew jis' say one word in Selkirk about gold, an' I'll shoot yew dead."

Then 'e takes 'is 'and away from my mouth, an' he jis' gives me one look—jis' one look, that's all.

So I nods back, knowin' it was a proper caution. "All right, pardner," I ses. "Mum is the word."

An' right secret we kep' it. We traded



away all our skins. An' we bought some sieves an' some skips, an' some spades and pickaxes, an' we loaded up a cart with stores, an' a keg of raw spirit, an' we bought a spavinned ole hoss, wot we a'most 'ad to carry, 'cos the road was too rough for 'im. 'Owever, we puts 'im in the sharfs an' made tracks, an' we went right away again back out of Selkirk into Klondyke, where we knew the gold lay. The horse—wal, he jis' larsted out the journey. The road was rough on 'im, an' 'e died. Wal, we traced up a bit into the 'ills, an' we tried here an' tried there, in the solid rock, but nary a nob of gold did we come on to.

So Dave ses, "Let's take to washin' of the dirt," 'e says. "'Cos there it is, an' we knows it."

So we does that, an' blow me, ef we didn't come acrost a very nuggetty lay. Why, there the stuff was!—some as big as peppercorns, an' some as big as peas, an' sometimes a lump like a bullet, and any amount of it in little specks—jis' dust of gold.

The winter was comin' on, but, by Gosh! we jis' went at it, we two, puttin' the stuff through the sieve as long as we could stand.

David felt the cold more'n me. I was right agin now—as strong as any hoss. But Dave, 'e took to corfin'.

We'd got a pile of stuff by this time; we got it in bags, and buried it 'gain' a tree.

"Dave," I ses, "yewr corf is powerful bad," I ses. "We'll stow it for the winter, an' start agin in the spring."

"Pard," 'e ses, "Corf or no corf, I means to work for this winter, an' all the winter—night an' day. An' it's the last winter I means to work. I shall then retire." Them was his words. "I shall then retire."

Well then, we works 'arder than ivver, both on us. Ah, cold! Cold ain't the word. 'Twayn't so much w'en it fruz; it was t' thaw we felt.

Wal, arter one thaw there come a freshet. It nearly washed away our little works—sieves, an' troughs, an' barrers, an' spades, an' all. We was up to our middle arterwards a-trying to unbury the gold. But the water got deeper an' deeper, an' then it all fruz over as tight as steel.

"Wal," I ses to Dave, "it's in sacks. It's safe anew, I reckon. It's at the foot o' that thar tree." It wos a fir, an' I gets up the tree with a hachet an' I blazes it.

"We kin find thet thar in the spring," I ses; "I guess an' kalkilate it's safe thar."

We didn't like leavin' it, but thar wayn't no help for it. We 'ad to go.

Dave stood a-lookin' at it an' 'e fell a-corfin', an' 'e shakes 'is 'ead an' comes along of me.

It wos in sacks, an' safe it lay under the fir-

tree. We couldn't do no more. Dave's corf was wuss. So we went to the 'ills.

I guess Dave caught a chill. Anyway, now I 'ad to nuss 'im.

We made a little 'ome in a cave up in the 'ills at Klondyke. We 'ad plenty of stores; we 'ad skins enough for bedding, an' our guns was loaded up for bear. I kep' the fire a-goin', an' the pot was never empty. I rubbed David's chest with whisky, but somehow, nuss 'im ivver so careful, I couldn't 'old 'im, for whilst I was a-rubbin' of 'im gently, poor old Dave pegged out.

At fust I kep' 'im there where he lay, but I was a-forced to put 'im outside, an' next day 'e was fruz as stiff as iron.

I tried to dig a grave, but the ground was that 'ard, it on'y turned the pint o' the pick.

So I went along to the far end o' the cave, an' I begins to work out a hole for Dave—a hole in the solid rock, where he could sleep peaceful until the great Resurrection Day. Gawd rest his soul! Wal, it did take me a bit o' time, but I'd nothink else to do, an' sakes; I'd a-done anythink for pore ole Dave.

I was all alone by myself—all alone 'cep' for the corpse o' that frozen man. So I worked away an' cut out the solid grave. It was all dark, on'y I got a lantern there to work by so I could see. So I finished the grave.

Wal, then I goes out an' I brings in the frozen corpse in my arms, tender-like, not forgettin' 'ow David 'ad nussed me. 'E was frorsted all over like with silver spangles all a-sparklin', but as stiff as a figger of cast iron. I takes 'im up, an' I lays the poor body down in the 'ole, quite comf'table. Only the 'ead, the 'ead didn't seem to rest quite easy.

So I walks all round the grave 'oldin' my lantern around me, an' I thinks, thinks I—wal, that 'ead ought to be more comf'table, anyway. I'd like pore ole Dave to lay easy in 'is grave.

Consequently, I lifts up the corpse tender-like, allus remembering as 'ow David 'ad nussed me better than 'ow I'd nussed 'im—or, leastways, more successful, an' I lays the corpse a-one side of the grave, an' gits into the grave, an' I takes my pick to work a more comf'table kind of a pillow in the rock for David to lie easy on. Wal, I takes my pick and—slosh!

Wal! d'yew know, I jus' turns my quid and I spits it out, f'r I was that took aback I had to expectorate. I had to, I tell yer, for at the fust blow of my pick out comes a bit of rock—a bit of rock!—a bit of gold!—a bit of solid gold—a block of the solid stuff itself—so help me!

Gold! It was gold, I tell yer!—Gold!—Gold! I'd got into the mass of it!—into the womb of the airth. My pick had struck it solid. The

real bully ore. The solid gold where it lay in veins, in lumps, and in chunks—the real stuff thick in the lode. 'Tain't no lie I'm tellin' yew.

That was 'ow we diskivered Klondyke, David Smith an' me.

CHAPTER  
SECOND

*MY FIRST WINTER  
IN KLONDYKE*

W'EN I wos away in the hills with my ole pal and pardner, David Smith, a-lookin' for solid gold w'ich we knowed wal was some-where's thar or nigh-bye, I 'ad to bury of David 'cos 'e took on sick, an' petered out.

That lef' me all alone, but it was whilst I was a-buryin' of 'im that I found gold—least-ways me an' 'im did atwixt us; we found it solid, but thar was on'y me lef' to get it, an' the winter was not only comin'—it 'ad come.

Wal, thar I was alone up in them hills, the wind as sharp as knives, an' me alone.

Not but thar wayn't plenty to eat in the cave — stores an' sich like, smoked moose, which is the reg'lar food up there, an' very sustainin', ship's biscuits, a keg of whisky, some black twist, an' my own an' late pardner's rifle, both loaded up for bear.

Not only 'ad I not got no pal, but there wayn't no livin' soul about thar. No, not so



much as a skunk of an Injun, nary a one. The nighest bar was at Selkirk, sixty mile away.

Sixty winter miles, mind yer! Drifts ten or twenty foot deep, nary a road, not a bull's track, an' snow an' ice iverywhere. My little 'ome—my lonesome cave up in them peaks—was a prison. I couldn't git out nohow, not for many a long month. I was snowed up, I guess, an' fruz in.

Durin' the first few weeks my ears got frorst-bit, so I 'ad to be careful arterwards. It was jis' a caution to me. I wrapped wal up for the res' o' the winter—you can pawn your shirt on that!

Gosh! The cold, the hice, the snow! The snow, I reckon, was a mercy. I a'most buried up the mouth of my cave with snow. I guess it was that as kep' me pretty comf'table. But warn't I lonely? Didn't I pray for the voice of a man?

Wal, I jis' simply works. The gold was thar, I was right on it, and nary a soul but Gawd and me knowed thar was gold right thar.

I was the first man, mind yer, to find gold in the hull of that region, and if so be as gold was known afore my time in British Columbia, thar was precious little of it, mind, afore my time. It was we wot diskivered Klondyke—leastways,

me an' my poor ole pal, Dave—'im wot I buried in the cave.

Wal, I guess, for a man all alone by 'is lonesome, I stuck to it commendable. I was at it pretty nigh allus 'cep' w'en I was sleepin'. I wakes an' I takes up my pick. I gits a good pile. I sorts out the stuff an' I feels 'ungry. I teks up my gun. Air there a bird? There ain't. Wal, then, I chews some dried moose or 'as a biscuit. Arter thet I works again. I carries out skips of the stuff an' shoots it in the snow. I sees a hare. I teks my gun an' treks thet thar hare. I ketches 'im, I roasts 'im, I eats 'im, an' I 'as a pipe a-digestin' of 'im, an' mebbe a nap arterwards; an' then I works again till I'm ready to drop, an' the long black night, the blessid blinkin' stars, my only pals.

Thet was one day, an' all the days o' thet long, lonesome winter was much alike. But the cold! Ah, don't go for to talk about that. The cold was sharper'n butcher's knives.

But my thoughts! Ah! All alone, I had my thoughts, you bet!

W'en fust I struck gold—wal, I jis' 'ad a pain in my abdomen. It struck me 'ere—right 'ere, an' I felt kind o' muzzy—kind o' silly. Sho now, thet's 'ow I felt.

Then I simply went fair mad. I went for thet rock with my pick. I fetched the quartz down—rotten quartz it was—I fetched it down

all of a 'eap, all tumblin' about my shins. I worked like mad, I did, sparks in my heyes an' gold sparklin' at my feet, till I was fair dizzy.

Then I sot down, an' I thinks.

An' I ses to myself: "J. T. Platt," I ses, "the worth o' this 'ere find of yewrs is more than 'undreds of pounds. It's foolish to say 'undreds; it must be thousan's. But 'ow many thousan's, J. T. Platt, yew ain't got noddle anew to know. Yew cayn't kalkilate that."

I ses to myself: "Wot does it mean to yew, J. T. Platt?" An' thet's the riddle I used to think out in them long winter nights. Thet's the conundrum I used to guess under them bright, blinkin' stars.

Then I used to think o' that gal of Boffin's—the second gal; the gal wot I used to take to Rosherville; the gal as worked in the match factory, Sally Boffin, whose wavin' 'andkerchief wus the last sight I see w'en I leaves old England, an' whose las' words was: "I'll wait for you—I'll wait for you, if I 'as to wait ten year."

Thet was eight year ago. An' I reckons, Ah! mebbe she's petered out by this, 'cos she was a bit delicate, was Sal. But ef so be she ain't, Sal will 'ave waited for me accordin' to her word, and "Sal," I ses, "you shall have a kerridge and an 'ouse in the pretty meadows with the daisies a-peepin' at yer, an' servants,

an' ponies, an' fine feathers, an' all, an' I'll 'ave a tall yaller dawg-cart for myself an' pals, an' we'll drive to Rosherville. By Gosh! we'll drive there 'ansom!"

'Cos iv'ry day I saw 'ow rich I was, an' more partic'lar towards the spring, w'en I'd got out a bit in the 'ills purspectin' around, when I could test the lay of the lode, and try the "hading" and its depth. I 'ad got into the solid ore—brown ore, in which gold is usual very plentiful. In the brown ore, which was extror'nary rich, the gold was in yaller threads an' in flakes, an' likewise it was there, as well I knowed, inwisible. In the rotten quartz there was 'ole bunches of it, but wot pleased me most was to find it lay reg'lar an' thick in a bed forty foot wide, an' findin' it again lower down whar it cropped out so as I could measure the strata. Then I went about all around chippin' 'ere and thar. Wot 'appened was this 'ere. I found more quartz ten mile or more away from Davy's Cave, and I leaves my rifle and goes for my pick, an' Lord luv yer, I diskivered the gold in the new lode I found of, was as thick a'most as the other. Why, there was jis' miles of this gold! It wayn't one vein only; there was mountains of it—disseminated in coorse.

So I ses, "J. T. Platt," I ses—for as thar was nary a soul to talk to, I used to talk to myself

by my own name—"J. T. Platt," I ses, "yew air a millionaire."

Thar couldn't be no manner of doubt about that.

It was a long winter, it seemed fifty year, nary a soul to talk to, an' the hicles sometimes 'angin' from my moustaches as though my own voice was to be closed up by gratin's. I kep' a kind o' register of the months by rememberin' the moons, but I lorst proper account of time.

I did lose heart, to tell the trewth. There was some days w'en my spirit was jis' clean broke. I sat down mis'able lookin' at my fire, roasted one side, fruz the other, though I 'ad skins piled all round me.

Arter a time the sun seemed a-strengthenin' an' the days lengthenin', an' I got more cheer-fuller with the hope of gittin' into sight again of human faces, an' also with the knollidge thet I was rich anew to be Lord Mayor—me, J. T. Platt, wot 'ad bin a packer in 'is Wuship's own ware'us' in Sin Paul's Churchyard, an' now, very like, could buy 'im up. At the thought o' that, I got workin' again, until iv'ry day, with the sun a-peepin' an' the spring a-comin', I begins to fidget to git away to Selkirk, or to git in some other way to the trail over the mountains towards Stuart's River, somewheres 'twixt the waters of the Peel and Porcupine, a-thinkin' I'd strike the Mackenzie



River, near Fort M'Pherson, and so by the Great Slave Lake, an' home by the Hudson, without so much as puttin' a foot in Alaska. There wayn't no Canadian Pacific Railway in them days, mind yer.

But 'ow was I to carry my stuff? 'Ere was I, the only man in the hull Continent who knowed that thar was all these mountains of gold in Klondyke. 'Ow was I to git off with wot I 'ad got; the sacks of stuff wot oughter tew go to the Stamps. 'Ow was I tew git off with the swag?—me, wot 'adn't no pardner.

P'raps with summer a-comin', I could easy run against sum Injuns, an' pay 'em to give me a lift, purvidin' only they didn't know I'd gotten gold. Ef they knew it was gold in my sacks, they'd put a bullet threw me as easy as grease. The more I thought an' kalkilated, the more I wished I 'ad a trusty pal.

So I guv up usin' my pick, an' I was out from sunrise till long be'ind sunset arter fur. I got a bear an' cub, an' with their skins an' some other fur lyin' by, I kivered up an' hid away a tidy bit of the gold wot I'd a'ready sewn up in sacks. I set a lot o' traps an' got a fair lot of skins. Nary a day but I got somethink to my gun, an' I was thinkin' 'ow I'd bury some of the stuff, an' start off with what I could carry towards Selkirk.

I was anxious not to blow the gaff about



my find, but to keep dark, an' 'old my secret tight as wax, 'cos I know'd well that ef I once gave scent it would spread all over the Do-minion. Wuss than that, it would boom all over the States, an' I should 'ave iv'ry rough from 'Frisco, an' iv'ry derved skunk from the Californian mines—inclloodin' cow-boys and Chinese—beatin' me 'ollow at my own gaime, an' takin' my rights away, p'raps afore I'd 'ad time to make good my claim.

Not bein' no miner, I didn' quite know 'ow to set about makin' a claim. Wot knollidge I 'ad, I'd a got from my poor ole deceased pardner. Many a long talk me an' 'im 'ad together w'en we was in the damp an' dirt lookin' for nuggets in the alloovial. It was 'im as put me up to lookin' for the solid ore, though it doan' look so sparklin'—the solid ore don't—as the stuff we buddled for in the drift.

Wal, not bein' no miner, I didn' understan' makin' a claim, but I gits some pitch—it took some gittin'—an' I marks up the croses of a Union Jack, and under it the letters, J. T. P. I marks this in Davy's Cave and iv'rywhar whar I'd bin with my pick, an' found gold; whariver I'd pecked I marked up the Union Jack.

Then orf I starts with all the gold I could carry—an' it wasn't no feather weight I lifted—not by no manner of means. It was sixty mile to Selkirk, an a derved rough road at that.

It wayn't on'y solid gold I took an' big nuggets, but some of the brown ore an' decomposed quartz, w'ich my poor ole pardner 'ad taught me as 'ow that was the best, 'cos, though it ain't nothink much to look at, w'en it's scrunched up by stamps an' worked scientific, that's the stuff as brings the big fortunes—ef it's yaller, ef the threads of gold is thar—an' thar they sartinly was.

Lor! but it's 'eavy stuff to carry, yew make no mistake!

Includin' climbin', I carried it best part of 'arf the way, an' then into Selkirk it's a fair even trail. So I reckoned I'd hide that lot away an' go fetch the rest, w'ich is wot I did.

So I goes back to my cave, w'ich I reaches one day afore sunset, an' there lyin' on my skins, eatin' my biscuits, an' drinkin' out o' my keg, was three men, mighty calm, cookin' pemmican in my pot.

So my dander riz, 'cos, mind yer, not on'y was they eatin' my biskits, but they was a-settin' on my pile of gold, w'ich I was orful anxious tew keep dark. So I ses, drawin' my Derringer! "Strangers," I ses, "yew kin git. This y'ere camp is mine."

Right away they starts to their feet, all a-cussin' at once, an' three revolvers was pinting at my 'ead.

"'Old 'ard!" I ses, borrowin' a notion from

my wits. "My mates will be comin' along direckly, six of 'em," an' I looks over my shoulder, as though they was close be'ind me.

"Put down your shooters," I ses. "Let's 'ave a palaver. Who air you?"

"We air trappers," ses one, an' they all sets down again as cool as ice.

"We 'ave been arter fur," ses another.

The third one 'e larfs a narsty, sarkastic larf, an' 'e says, "We 'ave been arter fur ontill now, but we air after gold henceforrud. Ain't we, pardners—I guess gold is our mark for the future, eh?"

Wal, I wuz thet took aback I wuz sick—an' I ses nothink at all—not a derned word.

"This little pile o' skins I'm a-settin' on," ses the sarkustic chap, "is rayther heavy fur bear. I 'ave investigated its inside, an' I compliment yew, stranger, on 'avin' diskivered one o' the pruttiest nuggets as I've ivver seed outside 'Frisco."

"I bows tew yew," I ses.

"Yew may," 'e says, a-larfin' cruel. "Yew may bow, an' yeur six mates, too—w'en yew finds 'em. Tell me, stranger. Thar's yeur trail," an' he pints to my footmarks in the snow. "Thar's yeur trail out—a single pair o'

footmarks with the toes a-turnin' in—an' thar's yeur trail home—the same pair of footmarks inturnd as afore. Wal, whar's the treck o' yeur mates? Thar ain't none. Yew ain't got no mates." 'E paused, grinnin' sarkustic, an' lookin' at the others.

"Yew air mighty secret, yew air. Wal, et's a good find. We 'ave been a-watchin' of you a-peekin' these rocks for more'n a week. Yew 'ave diskivered gold. Bully for us—'cos we 'ave diskivered yew."

My temper ain't all 'oney at the best of times, but now my dander so riz, wot with his exasperatin' larf, and them a-findin' out my lay, that I couldn' stan' it no longer, so I jis' chips in, an' I ses, probably a-swearin', I ses: "Enough o' this jaw," I ses. "This y'ere is my pitch, an' out you go, all on yer. You kin clar."

"Hark to 'im!" ses the little 'un. "Thet now is jis' wot I ses. The courts will grant 'im 'is claim, 'cos ef we comes to squarin' with 'im the jedge will say it were compulsion." Then they talks mighty solemn in their French lingo, confirmin' my surmise that they was Canadians of the ole French stock, excep' the tall, bony man, who I took to be a Yank, an' who seemed, by wot 'e was a-sayin' of, to be a-takin' my part a bit. But I could read this clear—it was my life they was a-talkin' of; an'

whether they should spare me, or square me, was wot they was whisperin' over an' argufyin' of.

Wal, I stood thar grindin' my teeth, but determined to sell my life at a dear price, for I was in a tight place, an' I knowed it. They was three to one. Probable I looked fierce, 'cos the little 'un ses, risin' an' comin' towards me—

“Look 'ere, stranger, anyway, we'll disarm yew. 'And over thet Derringer.”

“Not till she's spoken,” I ses, an I knowed now it was fight or die, so I riz my six-shooter like greased lightnin'. A'most in a second I seed the round red hole in 'is forehead as 'e fell at my feet. Immejate a bullet from 'is pardner's pistol whistled by my ear an' scarred the rock above me. My 'and was to 'is throat, 'im an' me a-wrestlin' an' grapplin' on the ground. Here's his second shot—this 'ole in my arm. It's healed pretty, eh? Wal, I let fly another cartridge; it missed, 'cos we was still a-strugglin' like wild cats, an' bullets whizzing in the piles of ore. I was a better shot than wot he was, 'cos w'en I straddled up, 'e lay there dyin', the blood oozin' from 'is breast. Then I looks roun', wondering what 'ad become of the third man, fur I'd only dealt with two on 'em. So I looks in the shadder, an' thar

sat the Yank pintin' of 'is drawn revolver straight in my heyes. My Derringer was done. I'd nary a shot left. I feels for my knife, but my belt 'ad been tore off in the struggle.

"I'll give yew time tew load," ses the Yank, "then I guess we shell see who is the real boss of this mine. Air that fair?"

"Oncommon fair," I ses.

"Yew might fust give that pore, dyin' critter a glass o' water, or a nip o' spirit," ses he, still sittin' partik'ler calm on a pile of rock.

Wal, I goes to the keg, stridin' over the body of the first man as I'd shot dead, an' I gits the spirit an' raises the head of Number Two, an' pours a drain of whiskey down 'is throat, but 'e was parst the 'elp of spirit. I held him against my shoulder an' thar—wal, that was the end.

"Now, you kin slide in yeur cartridges," sed the Yank, "an' me an' yew will settle this thing right out. Three to one was long odds. So I set out. W'en yew've loaded up, we shell be man against man. Thet will be fair."

"Yew air mighty gen'rous," I ses. "Afore I put in this bung, will you 'ave a liquor?"

"Why not?" ses 'e.

So I tilts the keg, an' 'im an' me stan's lookin' at each other over our glarses.

"It seems oncommon strange," I ses. "For



six months, all through the bleak, bitter winter, I 'ave been 'ere alone an longin' for a pardner. I 'ave been longin' to see a human face, or even a dawg's—I 'ave been wanting a pardner bad—prayin' to Gawd for a pardner—or even to 'ear the voice of a livin' man. At the fust sight of my fellow-critters we takes to killin' of each other," an' I looks at the two dead men lyin' thar in a pool of blood. "Wal," I ses, "'ere is tu yew!" I ses, an I drinks to the Yank.

"Britisher?" ses he.

I nodded. "You air from the States?"

"N' York originally, late of 'Frisco. It was me fust noticed this," an' 'e nods 'is 'ead at the pile of stuff from the ore. "D'yew know," 'e ses, "why I set out instead of jinin' in the fight?"

"'Cos yew was a Yank," I ses, "an' a 'ero, an' three to one ain't fair."

"Becos them two, w'en they 'ad tuk yeur Derringer, 'ad meant to murder yew, an' we three was to claim yeur mine."

"I thought as much," I ses. "I thought as much at the time."

Ses he, "At trapping I was game to them an' true, but I ain't no murderer," ses the Yank; "so onless yew wishes of it we'll adjourn our shootin' match *sine die*. My name is Colonel

Silas Jay. Yew kin trust me. I shan't let on about yeur mine. To-night, by yeur leave, I shell put up along of yew; to-morrow I shell make tracks fur *Dawson's Store*."

"Colonel Silas Jay," I ses, holdin' out my 'and, "you air an 'onest man, an' I could trust yew with my life."

"Yew hev," he ses smilin'.

"An' look 'ere," I ses, "if so be, as yew would be pardners with me—onconditionally—I reckon et would be a square deal. Is it a bargain?"

"You bet," 'e ses.

"Then we air pardners," ses I. An' I goes on to tell him in detail about what I'd found there in Klondyke. "Now, what might you reckon is the worth of our firm?" ses I.

"Wal," he ses, "wot yeur half is worth, I cayn't quite reckon up, but I wouldn't swop my half for—wal, not for a China orange. Gi'mme a pick. Let's give them two men civil burial."

## CHAPTER THIRD

## *THE KEY OF THE TREASURE*

WHEN the first Klondyke gold was discovered, and Colonel Silas Jay went halves with the lucky finder, J. T. Platt, they agreed that they would thoroughly prove the worth of the find before they made the discovery a fact of public notoriety.

Platt was an excellent illustration of the old saw, that it is better to be born lucky than rich. He was merely a loafer who had tried his hand at many an occupation before he happened to strike gold—a loafer, though not an idle loafer—a worker, though not a skilled workman—an ignorant, but not a foolish man.

Silas Jay, on the other hand, was a truly experienced, shrewd man of the world, who had never come across a big stroke of luck in his life until he met Platt and became "his pardner." He was grizzled, shrewd, and intelligent, and had a practical knowledge of mining both before and after the great American War.

In his earlier days he had made money, but he had not kept it, and, later in life, his chances had not turned out very happily. However, as a trapper, he had made good money, and was accumulating it in a small way when he met Platt, the lonely discoverer of the great Klondyke lode, in need of a chum, and equally in need of practical guidance and advice.

Platt told his new chum how the first gold he had found was not far away at the foot of the hills in the alluvial; how at first he had washed the dirt and found it rich in specks and nuggets of gold, when a flood had swollen the stream and rendered further work impossible until after the winter; how the discovery of solid ore had followed, through a fluke, by a lucky stroke of his pick in Davy's Cave; how he had made subsequent and successful efforts to test the lay of the lode; and how he had found other evidence of gold in the surrounding district.

All this interesting story Platt told to Colonel Silas Jay on the spot, and the two together essayed to test the value of the discovery by investigating the geological structure of the rocks by proving the depth, thickness, and workability of the lode, or rather lodes, which had been found, and by an assay, roughly and imperfectly made, of the ore.

All this work was undertaken by Platt's new partner with an increasing energy and an industrious interest which, in itself, was an indication of the grizzled old miner's opinion of the value of the find, and though he was chary of expressing sanguine ideas, he could not refrain from exhibiting symptoms of delight, as day by day indications of the character of the discovery were revealed in detail.

"What do yew reckon now is the worth of et, eh Colonel? What do yew kalkilate we air worth—us two?" Platt would continually ask, in that Americanised Cockney dialect which he had deviated into through circumstance and travel; a question which the experienced old miner usually answered by a French-Canadian shrug of his shoulders, alleviated, however, by a confident smile.

But after many days of prospecting, after laborious examination with pick and hammer of many a rugged peak and summit, followed by equally tiring shovel work in the detritus at the foot of the hills, the old miner-trapper, who had long been ruminating, expectorated his quid and broke his long silence.

"J. T. Platt, yew hev made a great discovery of gold.

"Gold hes been discovered in similar great

importance to this twice only during my memory and experience.

"It was discovered in 1848 on the American fork of the Californian Range, near the Sacramento, in the drift of the river-valleys, through a fluke by Colonel Sutter. He had erected a saw-mill, and on the very first rush of water along the newly-built mill-race, specks and glitterin's of gold were seen stickin' to the rough edge of the newly-sawn planks. Them specks was gold. It was not long, though Colonel Sutter endeavoured to keep the find secret, afore 'Frisco stood an empty town, and all the distric' roun' was flockin' to Sutter's Mill. When the Governor of California hurried thar, instead o' findin' a desolate valley, thar wuz 4000 men up to thar necks in pay dirt, earning eight dollars a day a-piece.

"A little later on all the world wuz there, an' 50,000 men workin' at the diggin's. Statistics shewed the yield for the year '50 was 40,000,000 dollars.

"I was there myself in the seventies, an' also afore the war. The yield I personally got from three years' tremendous hard work, including gambling and saloons, was practically nil—cypher, J. T. Platt. Do yew hear?

"And yet, through the discovery by Colonel Sutter—through the accidental discovery, mind



yew, owing to glitterin' specks of gold happen-  
ing to catch on the splinters of his new-sawn  
wood in the mill-race—statistics shew that  
1,200,000,000 dollars—or to compute it in  
British sovereigns,—£300,000,000 sterling—  
hev been taken out of California between the  
year 1848 until now.

“Turn yeur eyes, J. T. Platt, from this  
continent of America to Australia. I crosed  
the Pacific soon after the war to try my luck  
in Australia.

“Gold was fust found in New South Wales  
by Count Strzelecki, when the country was  
chockful of convicks. The find was hushed  
up at the earnest solicitations of the Governor,  
Sir G. Gipps, on account of its being a penal  
settlement. Thet were in 1839. Some years  
afterwards it was struck rich, and ther was the  
great rush for gold which affected all the world.  
Many millions of gold hev since been taken  
out of Ballarat alone. I myself raised about  
30,000 dollars of it, an' brought back a part of  
my little pile through Europe to N' York. But  
Paris is a melting-pot for dollars, and London,  
which is the cheapest city on airth, is likewise  
somehow a place where yew spends more  
money than any place in the tarnation globe.

“Now, J. T. Platt, did Colonel Sutter, who  
discovered California, benefit consid'able?

Not by no means. Did the noble Count in Australia? Not much.

"According to my kalkilations, you an' me, J. T. Platt, are h'y'ah in a distric' w'ich will boom. Klondyke will some day be recognised throughout the tarnation world as THE Champion Gold Country of the Universe.

"What shell me an' you git out of the diskivery?

"I will tell yew, Pardner Platt. We may get nuthin' at all—nuthin' considerable."

"What's that you're a-s'yin' of, Colonel?" exclaimed Platt, as clouds came over his dreams of fortune. "Nothink! Nothink! Why, look at all this 'ere! Miles of it! Ain't it ourn?"

"I don't reckon it air for certain."

"Not ourn?" exclaimed Platt, blank disappointment paling his face. "Then, instead of bein' millionaires, you reckon we're jis' worth nothink."

"For myself, I hev about 32,000 dollars in Van Roon & Wheeler's bank at 'Frisco, all of which, considering the handsome way you've acted, I am prepared to put into the firm of Jay & Platt, in the hopes we shall be millionaires ten or twelve years hence, if we are oncommon prudent, if we work like niggers, if we are loyal pardners, and, above all, if we have luck. Luck, that's the desideratum."

"Ho!" exclaimed Platt in a disappointed tone, "then I cayn't drive a coach-an'-six up the Strand to-morrer?"

"Nor for many a long year, boy. No. Listen to me. Yew see thet muddy river glinting in the distance yonder, with the pretty, wooded islands dotted in it? That's the Yukon. It will be a famous river soon. These thousands of years it has hardly seen a living soul excep' Injuns, but, owing to the lucky strike of your pick, cities will spring up along that river. All these hills will swarm with miners' camps. Down there along the riverside, and in all the creeks and tributary streams, which are full of auriferous drift, there will be hundreds an' thousands of diggers washing the alluvial. Here, where the ore is solid and true, there will be crushers, and jiggers, and stamps, and the shaft of many a mine. These things are bound to be. Gold, like murder, will out. You can't keep it secret. This desolate hole, only good enough for martens, an' foxes, an' moose, will be thronged, summer and winter, by a mob of the tailings of the world. In the long winter which you know they will be starved; they will be fruz: an' in the summer they will be baked brown, an' biled, and bit up by mosquitoes. But they will come, J. T. Platt, though at present only us two knows the secret. It's that strike

of your pick that will have done it, but where's the benefit of that to you, if the land ain't yourn?"

"It's a burning shyme!" said Platt hotly.

"Our game is this. First, we must keep it as dark as ever we can. We'll take just a few specimens, just a few, and shovel back the rest. We'll obliterate every sign of the find, and we will be as silent as the grave. Not a word in Selkirk."

"Nary a word," echoed Platt solemnly.

"Only it's impossible to keep it dark entirely. We must let the cat out of the bag in order to get our capital."

"Capital!" exclaimed Platt, tossing up a nugget and catching it again. "What is capital if this ain't?"

"You are right, J. T. That is capital. Solid gold like that blazin' specimen is capital anywhere. Only, as soon as you come to swop it about our secret is out, an' all the unhung rascals in North America will swarm round our claim like hornets."

"Wal, 'ow can we jis' git 'old of the land an' let 'em work for us—let 'em pay us tew dig on our land?"

"You are right again, J. T. That is just my idea. Listen to me very careful now. If you an' me liked to set to work washing dirt in

the alluvial we could make a tidy little pile without its gettin' wind. But I ain't satisfied with a little pile, considerin' the tremenjous value of our find. I want to git to work on the ore. I want to hev stamps here an' machinery. I want to have an interest in all the work that others will do here. I have sat on a bank-stool myself. I have seen how the real pull is got by people in cities. I wants a royalty on all the hundreds of millions that will be took out of Klondyke."

"'Undreds of millions!" echoed Platt, crossing his bandy legs nervously. "'Undreds of millions, Colonel Silas! Say that agen!"

"Now, this is my scheme. Shovel back all the ore you've took out. Cover up the cave with brushwood; obliterate all signs of your pick an' shovel; take back with us as many small parcels of specimens as we can carry, an' we will hook it straight away out of these parts altogether, an' into the centre of civilisation."

"Go on, Colonel. I guess I'm with yew."

"By the centre of civilisation, I mean a centre. I mean Montreal; I mean N' York; I mean Ottawa—or, best of all, the metropolis of the airth—London.

"Then I guess we will interview some great

capitalist, some millionaire banker—Rothschild for choice.

“We will go halves with him. He shell help us, an’ we’ll hev the biggest machinery and the greatest and most scientific gold-producin’ factory in the entire universe.”

A flush of excitement glowed through the old trapper’s veins, and his voice grew tremulous with enthusiasm. The younger man, carried away by the eloquence of his partner, leapt in the air and cut all manner of capers, his mind lost in boundless transports and golden visions.

A long silence ensued, during which Colonel Silas Jay produced a twist of black tobacco, from which he proceeded to cut off a quid for immediate consumption.

“I’m kalkilatin’ how to make good our claim, partner. Where are we?”

“About sixty miles from Selkirk. Yon is the Yukon. That far-awye glitterin’ water—that’s Muddy-Bend River. This y’ere is Klondyke. Dawson’s is over thar, an’ about five mile——”

“Yes, yes. But what territory are we in?”

“Territory? Blowed if I know! Ontil I found gold here with my pick, nary a soul cared. Territory! It’s the territory of the



deer, of the bear, of the Injun trapper. Thet's whose territory it is, I reckon."

"What I mean is—air we in the United States, or air we in the Dominion of Canada? Or is it Alaska—an', if sò, whose government is it? The Czar of Russia's or the Stars and Stripes? Or is it yeur Queen's? Upon my soul, J. T. Platt, we hev a lot to learn afore we set about makin' a claim. We're somewhere near the border, I du know that, but who is sovereign of these golden mountains—who owns these golden streams?"

"Du it matter, Colonel?"

"It matters consid'able. All roun' about here, this is virgin land. It's an ice-desert now ; in the summer it's barren rock. Nobody, I reckon, cares to hev it or hes ever thought of making a claim to it from any government. Wal, when we know our latitood, and, p'raps still more important, our longitood, we kin easy find out who rules over this desolation—what government rules, or who is monarch of this realm. Then we kin spread out our sacks of specimens, we kin say: 'Do you see them nuggets? Do you like 'em, an' would you like some more? If so, we can tell you what part of yeur territory you can find 'em in, providin' you grant us a little claim of, say, a hundred square miles, an' there will still be thousan's of

miles lef' for you. Give us a grant, an' we can jis' hand over to yeu some hundreds of millions of money.'

"Some hundreds of millions—that's what you've struck, J. T. Platt. I tell yew that, sitting h'yah now on the Klondyke; that, or suthin' like it, es the value of the natural treasure locked up in these rocks an' in these streams and gulches. But the key of the treasure ain't here; the key is in London."

The old trapper finished his long monologue, and, slipping a quid of tobacco in his mouth, he proceeded to chew in thoughtful silence.

CHAPTER  
FOURTH

*KLONDYKE IN  
LONDON*

**Y**EARS before the name of Klondyke had been whispered in New York, years before the Klondyke boom had filled all Wall Street with feverish excitement, and sent men by the thousands flocking to the new diggings in the snow-capped mountains by the muddy Yukon River, two sunburnt, seedy-looking, strangely-dressed men were seated in the outer office of the great financial house of the Rosenthals, the well-known bankers of Lombard Street.

They had been sitting there for two and a half hours, from half-past one till four, when a fashionably dressed young man, one of the junior clerks, whose clothes were so expensive that he was unable to afford lunch, and who was consequently in a hurry to get home to what he called "dinner," looked at his watch, and, observing that it was precisely four o'clock, shut his ledger with a bang, and exclaimed to

another junior clerk who, if possible, was even more beautifully dressed than himself: "Closing time."

Each of these faultlessly attired young men then proceeded to remove a sheet of writing paper from his wristbands, after which both disappeared for a few minutes, to emerge in polished hats, light gloves, and beflowered button-holes, the costume appropriate for the worship of a certain feminine deity whose customary adoration culminated at half-past four, libations being offered at her shrine at a glass and marble temple known in the city as "Nob's."

Eager to sally forth to their rites, the clerk aforesaid approaching the men from Klondyke asked superciliously:

"Have you an appointment with Sir Jacob Rosenthal?"

The men from Klondyke assented.

"Your name is——"

"Jay and Platt."

"And what time is your appointment with Sir Jacob?"

"Half-past one."

"Ah!—well it's now four—we close at four. Sir Jacob cannot possibly see you now. Will you call again to-morrow?"

"What time, young man?"

"I'll see what appointments Sir Jacob has," replied the clerk, going to a telephone, and applying his ear for an answer. "Hum! Ha! What? Repeat. Oh yes. Very well. Now? To-morrow? No. Yes—what? Very well. Sir Jacob will see them then. Oh? Yes—immediately? Very well."

"Sir Jacob will see you now," said the young clerk, hurriedly divesting himself of his gloves, flower, hat, and stick. "This way if you please. Colonel Silas Jay, sir—Mr J. T. Platt, sir."

The two men from Klondyke suddenly found themselves in a very large room, where a handsome old gentleman, none other than the great Sir Jacob Rosenthal himself, was seated at a very large table covered with papers:

At another sat a middle-aged man, Sir Jacob's private secretary.

Sir Jacob looked up as the two men entered.

The secretary rose, and welcomed them to chairs by his table. "Your name is Colonel Platt—No? Ah! Colonel Jay and Mr Platt. Ur. Yes. I remember. We have a letter of introduction from your bankers in San Francisco, Colonel Jay, Messrs Van Roon and Wheeler. Well, what is it?"

"We have discovered a gold mine," replied Colonel Silas Jay, determined not to waste

time with unnecessary introductory matter, "and we want capital to erect stamps and machinery."

"Gold mine!" exclaimed Sir Jacob quickly from the other table, "no good! Dozens of men come here every week with gold mines."

"But this is extraordinary rich, Sir Jacob."

"They all are," said Sir Jacob testily. "They all are extraordinarily rich. Everybody who brings a mine to me has the most wonderful property that was ever known. Our pigeon-holes are full of wonderful mines. I have had reports about three—or is it four?—this very day."

"Well, our mine really is the richest, the most——"

"And you have samples of it in those sacks, eh? I know. Oh, don't open them, for goodness sake! I have seen enough samples of ore of late to sink a ship."

"Wal! thar's jis' a proof then, anyway," exclaimed Platt, suddenly producing from his pocket a nugget of solid gold as big as a good-sized potato. You kin look at thet, Sir Jycob Rosenthal. It will convince yew—eh? What! no! Doan that fetch yer?"

"I have dozens of them, my good man. Nuggets! Mr Davis, just open that cupboard and show these gentlemen."



The secretary slid open a door, and, taking out a larger nugget than that which had been produced by the men from Klondyke, exhibited it to them.

“What is it labelled, Mr Davis?”

“Mount Kalgoaroo.”

“Ah! I remember. That came from West Australia. We did examine into that. It is a genuine nugget. We sent out a surveyor. All the claims near it were staked out by others. It came too late to us. Too small altogether—not worth our while, Colonel Jay. Where do you say yours is? Klondyke? Where’s that? On the River Klondyke, eh? Well, point it out on the map. Where? North-West Canada—dreadful place—Siberian. Arctic! Why, you’re pointing to the Arctic circle!”

“It’s not marked on this map, Sir Jycob,” said Colonel Jay, studying the map which Mr Davis had opened for him. “It’s a good map, sir, but the fact is, the whole place is new; it is not surveyed; the rivers are not marked. The place is a desert, in fact. But it air rich, Sir Jycob. Wal, there’s just millions of it!”

“I daresay,” said the great financier in a sceptical tone. “What proof have I of that?”

"Our word," said Colonel Jay, with a certain impressive sedateness of manner.

Sir Jacob looked at the two men, his eye lingering on Platt's frayed waistcoat and worn fingers.

"An honest workman's word is often more to be relied upon than the affidavit of a mining engineer," said the great financier, with an endeavour to speak courteously, "still, I want more proof than a man's word. But all that district—the North-West Territory—Alaska—it's an impossible district. It's ice-bound."

"The winter is nine months long," said Colonel Jay; "the temperature is 50 degrees below zero, but there are lodes of gold ore, twenty yards broad. I cannot say how deep."

"Exactly! You do not know. It has not been tested. You have had no machinery to sink shafts. You have only had your pickaxes. You have picked out some rich ore. Yes, you have the proof of it in your sacks. But you have not been able to drive adits into the lode; you have had no boring implements; you cannot have truly proved what is there. That is what you want me to do. You want me to send out machinery. You want me to sink a fortune in attempting a discovery."

"We hev discovered it, Sir Jacob."

"I know. I believe you. But there is hardly a country in the world where gold does not exist. Everybody thinks his find is the richest imaginable. The people who come here to me are mostly genuine. There is gold everywhere almost. Eastern America as well as North-West, Central-Brazil, Venezuela, New Brunswick. Why, I had an enthusiast here from Ireland the other day. Ireland! and on that shelf you can see the sample. It's quite genuine. He quite believed he could settle the whole Irish question if I would let him have £20,000 for mining operations, and, strange to say, gentlemen," continued Sir Jacob Rosenthal, rising amiably, "the very best assay of gold I ever saw in my life came from—where do you think? Eh? From Wales. Yes, Wales in Great Britain. Not far—no. Between here and Liverpool. I would show you Mr Forbes' analysis, but, really, gentlemen—time passes—numerous engagements. Delighted to have seen you. It was a beautiful nugget you showed me. So much obliged to you. Mr Davis will write to Messrs Van Roon & Wheeler, and thank them for this interesting interview—and, ur—Good-day."

"Discouraging," was Colonel Jay's remark, as the two men were making their way in a

four-wheeler to the little hotel in the Waterloo Road where they were staying.

"Wal! Yis! But that man, pardner, was jis' sick of gold," said Platt.

"He is the richest man in the world, Jim—the very richest man in the world," said Colonel Jay.

"An' still he ain't tired of keepin' shop, eh? Wal, we hev brought him a gold mine second to none, an' he wayn't no buyer. Wal, that was it. 'Tain't no good offerin' food to a man wot's got 'is belly full. He was jis' sick of gold. He couldn't digest no more of it. Now, wot air we to do?"

"I guess there's hundreds of capitalists in London besides the Rosenthals," said Colonel Jay. "We must see somebody else."

Every day, week after week, the two men from Klondyke were interviewing bankers, financiers, financial agents, and company promoters, ascending and descending omnibuses, going up and down lifts, waiting in dismal offices, and occasionally spending long hours in the ante-rooms of banks, until they grew quite familiar with the city of London, and with its huge blocks of offices, each a city in itself, with its streets of corridors, its devious courts and passages, its light basements, and strange electric-lit underground life, but they

made no headway towards fortune. They made clear statements, they were ready with their maps, they had now got papers proving their claim, they had good specimens and an excellent assay, but nobody cared to speculate.

“Gold mines are a drug in the market,” said one great firm of company promoters. “Bring us a patent bicycle, and we will give you fifty thousand for it—but the public won’t look at gold mines. No, no, thanks. Don’t produce your ore. Excellent specimens, no doubt, but we don’t want to see them. The public won’t touch gold mines just now.”

“H’m!” said another firm, “where is your mine? Canada. Now if it had been in South Africa we might have dealt with you. Things must be South African now. Eh? What? Foolish! All fashion. Yes, but there is a fashion in investments, you know, so we have to follow the fashion, too, like other people.”

“Oh, another gold-mine!” exclaimed the great Mr B——. “Take it away. London has sunk more in gold in mines than it has ever taken out of them. Let me have a solid home industry for my money, well established, and showing good profits.”

They got very tired of these wearying disappointments, and eventually they fell

victims to a sharp-witted company-promoter of the baser sort. True, a company was brought out, the preliminary expenses of which swallowed up nearly the whole of the available moneys our two honest adventurers from Klondyke possessed, but the public did not subscribe, though it was advertised in very large type, and although the directorate was on modern model lines, consisting of an impecunious peer, a shrewd Scot, a wily Jew, and two major-generals in the brave British army.

They had now wasted many months in London, and were becoming seedier every day. Vexation, excitement, and worry were wearing them down more even than the hard weather of the Yukon district, or the long and dismal hours of the interminable Klondyke winter. They decided to make one final effort, and, having succeeded in getting a new letter of introduction to a firm of excellent standing whom they had not hitherto approached, they duly presented themselves at an hour previously appointed.

“Colonel Jay,” said the principal of the firm, after he had afforded a patient hearing to his visitor, “do you know how many men there are in the city of London going about from firm to firm hawking gold mines? You do not.



Then I will tell you," he continued, after a pause, "probably about two thousand."

"Yes," struck in his partner savagely, "and our time is valuable. But there is one striking similarity about all these men who go about with gold mines in their pockets—they have no heels to their boots."

"I hev'n't got none on mine," said J. T. Platt, looking at his feet. He had indeed worn them through, and was footsore with walking on the London asphalt. "But mark my words," he continued, looking up with a desperate air, "though I hev'n't got no heels to my boots, an' though I 'aven't got no money, I've got mountains of the stuff it's made on; an' I've got a bit of paper in my pocket wot can some day buy up yew and yeur bank an' the Lord Mayor of London 'isself. An' the day will come when yew will be proud to shake my 'and. Yes, that's wot I tell yew."

CHAPTER  
FIFTH

*FROM LONDON  
TO KLONDYKE*

WHEN Colonel Jay an' me couldn't get no capital for our Klondyke mine anywhar in the whole city of London, I felt a kinder sick thet I hed to own up I was a Cockney—though I hed since got Americanised in the Stytes, an' wuz only a Cockney by bairth, an' by reason of the fac', thet I was for years a packer in one of the best 'ouses in St Paul's Churchyard, w'ich wuz a Lord Mayor.

We 'ad come tew London a puppos for tew git money tew work our mines. An' we couldn't git none. Nary a dollar!

"Wal," ses I to my pard, "there's a gal down Lime'us wot I knowed—Sally Boffin. I allus meant to go an' claim her rich; I allus meant to drive down 'ansom, to take her a kerridge full o' presents, to say: 'Sally, my gal, I've bin away eight year. I didn't think tew be so long, but I've worked 'ard for yew,

an' I've made a fortune for yew. Yew 'ave waited for me, and this y'ere cartload of trinkets is wot I've brought yew.'

"Wal, I cayn't dew that thar, Colonel. So I shell go down to Lime'us, ragged has I am, an' I shall say: 'Sally, I cayn't wait no longer, yew mus' cum' along o' me now. I've struck riches, but gold air proverbially eludin'.'"

So I goes down to Lime'us, an' I calls on 'er par. But lor! he'd bin took home these four or five year. So I ses: "Well, then, whar is Sally?"

It was fortunit I foun' 'ur so heasy. She 'adn't gone not far, only as fur as number two-hundred-an'-heighdeen, so I pulls the trigger of the bell, wot was broke, an' then I knocks my knuckles agin the door, an' I ses: "Is Sally in?"

"No, she ain't; she ain't come home from school yut," ses a well-knowed voice w'ich was turnin' a mangle. So I pipt in, an' I ses: "Gorn!" I ses, "why there you air yourself! I knowed yer voice in a minnit. Sally," sez I, "Sally Boffin, don't yer know me? I'm Jim Platt."

"Sakes!" she cries, a-screechin', "don't you come foolin' 'ere! Wot—eh? Jim! Bow-legged Jim! Why, it is you! Lor', then you ain't dead! Wot 'ave you bin a-doin' of, an'

what for didn't you write back to me, Jim—  
an' me writin' so orfen. O Lord! O dear! if  
Bill a-sees yer inside 'is 'ouse, there will be  
bloodshed—s'elp me, there will!"

"Who's Bill?" sez I.

"Bill Ogg," she ses, "the cat's-meat man,"  
she ses. "My 'usband," she ses.

"O Lor'!" ses I, "but the ten year ain't  
up yet," I ses. "Ah! Sally, I've wyted for  
you," I ses, reproachful, and a-settin' down, for  
I was that took aback I couldn't stan' up no  
longer.

"Doan set down on the cat's meat," she  
hollers. "Bill's that conscientious about the  
meat—if it was goin' to human Christians he  
couldn't be not more particular."

"An' so yew air a married woman," I ses,  
wipin' the seat o' my trousers. "May Gawd  
forgive yew, Sally! I wouldn't 'ave believed  
it—nut if nobody 'ad gorn an' tole me."

With that she blubbers.

Wal, I 'ardened myself, an' I looks at her,  
an' I reckons—wal, she ain't the same Sally as  
I knowed, an' I swore at her, an' as I leaves 'er  
door I shouts: "Yew ain't Sally Boffin, yew  
air Sally Ogg. Bad luck to yew an' tew your  
cat's-meat an' yeur mangle!" an' I slams the door  
behind me. An' I goes down the street, an'  
thar the pruttiest luttel gal you ever see comes

trippin' along with a skippin' rope—an' I knowed 'ur in a second, fur all I was half blind with blubbering, for the picture of my old Sally that she used to was, an' I picks her up an' I harsks 'ur name, to w'ich she answers :

“Sally Ogg.”

“Right yew air, Sally Ogg,” I ses. “Wal, an' dew yew like torfee?” I ses; so she sticks her finger up her nose, as though it was a periwinkle, an' cocks 'er 'ead o' one side, an' she looks so funny comic that I fell a-larfin', an' then I jis hugs 'er close, an' I cuddles 'er tight, an' I kisses 'er about forty times all over 'er prutty face, fur she was the picture of my Sally—my own old Sally—she was her minyachoor, an' I sets 'er down, an' I whips my nugget out o' my pocket, for I 'adn't got nothink else left, an' I claps it in 'er dirty little 'ands, a-s'yin': “There yew air, Sally; thet's a lump o' gold—that is. I've 'undreds and thousan's o' lumps like that on my proputty at 'ome; yew kin tell yeur mother that, it will make 'er grizzle,” I ses.

Then I futed it back to the Waterloo Road, for I 'adn't got nary a cent in my pocket—no, not a bloomin' brown.

Wal, w'en I sees my pardner, I jis' feels a trifle dizzy—I doan' mean Dizzy the statesman

but dizzy in my 'ead—'cos Silas was a-packin' up our traps, an' orf back to Klondyke.

"How is Sally?" ses he, a-smilin' sarkustic, as though he knowed what was a-comin'.

"Don't you mention 'er," I ses, "she's somebody else; she's married a cat's-meat man, an' turns a mangle."

He shakes my 'and sympathetic. 'E 'ad a tender 'art, 'ad my pard. "Wimmen is wimmen," 'e ses, "an' they allus will be."

"Gorn!" I ses, though I was beginning to think the same as 'im.

"W'en you knows as much about wimmen as I do, you won't want to hev no traffick with 'em," ses he. "I hev got a wife myself. You hev not; J. T. Platt, I congratulate yew."

"Pardner," ses I, "I didn't know yew was a married man."

"But I am," ses he, "tho' I doan' mind tellin' yew I gave my missus the slip in British Columbia. However, we won't talk about 'er. She ain't worth it."

"Wal, confession's good for us both," I ses. "There's our last nugget," I ses. "I bin an' gorn an' give it away to Sally's little gal."

"The jauce you 'ave!" 'e ses. "Well, 'ow air we to pay our little bill? We owe three months' board an' lodgin'."

"Chalk it up!" ses I; "we kin pay with a



Hi-ho-u! Ain't we millionaires, though we ain't got the ready?"

So we chalked it up, in order tew w'ich we 'ad to go downstairs precious silent early in the mornin', with our parcels on our shoulders, an' they wasn't not very 'eavy—not by no manner of means. But we wos honest, an' we lef' our Hi-ho-u be'ind us for one 'undred poun's. We puts it along with the account both upon the tyble, an' we goes off silent on tiptoe.

It was comf'table to think we'd settled that little account honest. Then we starts to get back to Klondyke; we works our way afore the mast, a wonderful roun'-about way; fust to Rio, an' then roun' by Cape 'Orn, now in one craft, an' now in another, spendin' two year a-doin' of it; right up the west coast of the two Amerikas to Vancouver, an' then it took us a bit of time to fetch Klondyke.

We lef' Victoria, whar every one starts from now, an' went up to Juneau aboard the Pacific steamer, *The Queen*. We 'ad a narrow escape of the dangers of the Muir glacier, a thousand feet of it tumbling into the water, close to our steamer, an' breakin' up into hicebergs hall around us. Destruction was himminent, but we only thought wot a lovely picture of grandeur them sheer solid cliffs of hice was. They wuz eight 'undred to a thousand feet 'igh,

mind yew, an' we didn't know of our danger for lookin' at the bewty of the gorgeous colours in them almighty bergs. That glacier ain't far off Juneau. Juneau is an Injun city, and that's whar we sez good-bye to civilisation. Colonel Silas, he ses to mè : " It's a miner's city now, becos they have thar the Great Treadwell Mine, w'ich is the biggest mine in the world. We see its smoke from the deck of our steamer—the smoke of the chlorination works of the Treadwell. They quarry the gold ore thar, downright quarry it in an open quarry—only it's a very low grade ore—about three dollars to the ton. But it has a mill of 500 stamps, and that's the biggest in the world. It works night and day. Some day we shall 'ave a mill like that at Klondyke. Some day!—next year, I 'ope. Then shan't we show the world some-think? Somethink! Lor! it will beat all the dreams of gold that ever was! You wate a bit! You'll 'ear of me."

We went by the rout that they calls the new rout now, we went by Skagway Bay an' Muddy Lake an' by the rapids. Only, mind yew, instead of goin' by the White Pass, which is mighty bad, we went by the Chilkoot w'ich is ten times wuss.

My pard was very near fruz to death afore we got tew the Chilkoot. 'Owever, we got

over the steep, I doan' rightly know how ; every cent we 'ad earnt wuz spent in sledges, an' sail, an' dawgs, an' bisket, an' moose, an' tackle, an' we should 'ave stayed thar an' petered out an' been fruz into human icebergs only it wos not our turn.

It was bad enough to the foot of the summit, snow ivvrywhar—without w'ich, in fac', we should hev hed not no chanst at all, fur, of course, we wuz trailin' on sledges, an' with dawgs. We 'ad to draw all our tackle over the snow, an' now it was a-thawin', for it was towards the end of April. The thaw was fearful, an' the blizzard, an' the wet, an' slush, an' sleet, an' blarsted drizzle !

'Owever, we went on, 'cos we knowed we mus' git through on the snow, fur to draw our necessities over the bare ground would be on-possible ; so we went, an' the dawgs begins a-sniffin' an' a-whinin', an' soon we comes to a most 'orrible sight ! It was a dead man—corrupt. 'E 'ad bin fruz to death, an' now in the thaw his corpse was corruptin' accordin' to Nature.

Wal, we stopped nigh by that fearful sickenin' horror. My pard's face was drord, an' 'is eyes holler, an' I reckons 'e kalkilated 'e woul' be a dyin' man 'isself soon, fur 'e turns 'is back an' couldn't chew 'is quid. No. 'Ow-

ever, 'e puts 'is shoulder to the sleigh, an' we travels on.

Even the dawgs was frightened, but we went on tho' our feet was leaf to drop.

W'en we anchors for the night, an' pitches our tent, an' makes a fire, rh—the cold o' that night at the foot o' the steep! The thaw below us, the hice and the snow towerin' above us, an' the blindin' blizzard!

We was there three days under our tent, an' nivver moved, an' my pard ses: "Wal, anyhow, that is kivered up now."

So I ses: "Wot is kivered?"

An' he ses: "Ah! The snow hes kivered up that thar!" an' he shudders.

Wal, then, when the blizzard was done we went on. We 'ad to scale the summit o' the Chilkoot. I think the three days' rest we 'ad made us a bit stronger, but we hed to port everythink up. It was too steep for the dawgs to use the sleighs. 'Owever we did it is a lick to me to this day.

There's a bit o' shelter at the top, a kind of second summit, an' as we turns roun' a rock—Gawd 'ave mercy upon us! there wuz a dreadful thing! Death in the snow. Ther was a whole camp fruz — there wuz nine men fruz into statues of hice, an' the snow heapt up a-top of 'em. They wuz all dead,

only ther dawgs—the dawgs, sum of 'em, was alive.

Only, horror!—but I cayn't tell you ov it excep' I shivers—the dawgs, for food, 'ad worried the frozen dead!

Thar was one man a-settin' down near wot 'ad bin a fire, an' a woman leanin' agin 'im fruz dead; there 'ad bin a tent, but the storm 'ad blown it away; there wuz siveral snow 'eaps a-lyin' roun' about. Altogether there wuz nine—all dead! All fruz, an' stiff, like men cut in sparkling stone.

But the dawgs 'ad made the horror of it a more loathsome sight than I can tell. It wuz gruesome! It made me right sick.

Wal, there was two sledges w'ich we couldn't go for to overhaul then. But pard, 'e gives a great sware, an' he ses: "Sakes! is our secret out, matey? There's picks an' shovels in them sleighs, an' these nine dead men is miners. D'ye hear—miners!"

For all the horror of the deaths, the idea that they 'ad been arter our gold took the horror away, but pard, 'e ses: "Let's harness up the dawgs, an' take their sledge along of us; it will compensate us for what we've 'ad to leave behind." So we harnesses the dawgs, an' on we goes forrüd.

It was the most difficultest tarsk we ivver

done in our lives goin' up the Chilkoot summit. I ain't told you—I cayn't tell all the fearful days; the rotten ice, the squelch, the 'unger, the 'ardships, the privations—food we 'ad with us, but under canvas, an' we too dawg-tired to unpack an' rig up the stove an' cook it, 'cos part of the stove'd bin an' lorst itself through thawin' the ice, an' so slipped through—an' we wos that fatigued with drorin' our sleigh—collar-work for days, it wos—the dawgs done up. An' my pard, stiff with rheumatics, a-losin' of his grit, made me lose mine, 'cos w'en 'e ses: "Shoot me, Jim, I'd like to die!" I knowed 'is mind was wanderin'. I was that depressed myself—the eternal blue of the snow ivvrywhar, 'cos blue et was through our spectacles. An' then bein' short of fodder for the dawgs, an' the climbin', the carryin', the lifting, an' portage up them eternal heights of hice, an' the abandoning of necessities, wot we couldn't lift nohow an' yit couldn't do without—things we 'ad worked our passage acrors the seas to buy—it broke our 'earts. We wus bankrup'—body and soul.

Thet was our condition w'en we reached the Chilkoot summit, an' went across the plain whar the frozen camp was, an' all them stiff 'uns. But, hevin' got thar, it put grit into me, an' so it did to my pard, for he ses: "Let's 'ave



a long drain o' whiskey," 'e says, "an' go on for another spell ontill we drop. Let's get away from these dead 'uns. The wind 'ere is like razors."

So we each 'ad a stiff dose of whiskey. It seemed to liven us, an', w'en we went on, arter a bit, thar was a slope, an' the drorin' was more easy, an' we could leave it to the dawgs. An' soon the slope became a steep, and almost afore we knowed it, we wos a-tobogganing down. We wos goin' thru the snow like lightnin', the wind rushin' in our ears, we holdin' on to our sledges, w'ich went down like shot, an' we scudding down like a house o' fire, dropping down, shooting down, through the frozen snow. It took us a few minutes to reach the bottom; it 'ad taken us a week to git up the same height t'other side.

We picks ourselves up breathless. The other sledges, too—they came all of a heap. We wos thru the Chilkoot! Thar was sum narsty road yit—'undreds of miles of it—but we 'ad got thru the wust of it. We 'ad got thru the Chilkoot, so we pitched our camp, chucked some fodder to the dawgs, chewed a bit o' raw moose, 'cos we'd got no wood for lightin' the stove, and thar we set a-shiverin' till we slep'.

In the mornin' I thought my pard was goin'

to die, 'e was that ill, an' 'e would 'ave bin a stiff 'un, but we wuz picked up by a party of prospectors and miners who ketched us up an' wuz goin' our way, an' well-equipped they wuz.

We wuz surprised to find miners goin' up thar, an' the Colonel, ill though he was, whispers to me: "*Mum's the word about our find.*" But it turns out sum scientific chap—a gologist—'ad bin out near by that way even afore we was, as the Dominion Gov'ment 'ad sent 'im, an' 'e 'ad reported fav'able. It was 'im wot gave 'is nyme to Dawson City.

This lot wot ketched us up at the foot of the Chilkoot was off to Forty Mile Creek, whar gold had been already found consid'able whilst we wuz away in Europe, an' the news of that 'ad spread, an' they telled us that miners wuz a-flockin' thar. So we was a-gittin' warm, as pard ses to me. Still our find was many a long way from theirn.

Long afore this we 'ad got our claim agreed by Gov'ment, so, in a way, it didn't matter to us ef our secret wos out; still, our gyme wos tew keep our find dark if so we could, an', as a fac', we did not blow the gaff to our new mytes wot ketched us up at the foot of the Chilkoot, but kep' it strict to ourselves. Pard petered on an' didn't peg out, but with

the kind treatment he got from our new pals got better in a wonderful short time, an' soon was strong as ivver.

As fur all the story of our journey to Dawson City, I reckon it would fill a book—crorsin' frozen lakes on our sleighs, with sails rigged up out of the tarpaulin, boat building—fur we 'ad to turn to an' build our own boat to crows Lake Bennett—more frorst, more hice, more snow, but still with our new chums it was quite a different thing from the 'ardships we 'ad gone thru.

We 'ad a long palaver with some Injuns near Tagish Houses—w'ich is a very sacred place to the Redskins, and very sullent they was. We 'ad quite a day's spree, shootin' jack-snipe an' swans on Lake Marsh, so we got plenty of fresh eatin', w'ich did pard a lot o' good, but more especially the Spring, w'ich now was showin' green, an' the sun gettin' warm. We passed Mud Lake and down the Lewes River, snow-capped mountains still all around us, but vegetation close to, and Spring—bewtiful Spring!—mykin' our 'arts glad, an' the mosquitos beginnin'. Then thar wos the canyon! We 'ad to shoot that, an' likewise White Horse Rapids, an' so to Lake Lebarge. The weather by now hed got simply sweet, an' our camp on the Koolalinqua was a dream.

We went through a lot of rapids, an' the Big an' Little Salmon Rivers, Five-Finger Rapids, Rush Rapids, Rink Rapids, and all the boilin' water churnin' roun' the boat and all. They air pretty dangerous to shoot. Yew jis' shuts yeur eyes an' go; the boat whizzles down; the rocks fly by; it's hit or miss, it's life or death, I tell yew. Them rapids is like soapsuds for froth, an' they air like greased lightnin' fur speed, an' when yew gits thru, yew takes a long breath. Yew du so. Yew thank Gawd.

Sech fun as that to be 'ad!—an' me for years content to be a bloomin' packer in St Paul's Church'ard!

Wal, we gits on to the Yukon, an' passes the Stewart River, an' comes to Selkirk, whar we was known, an' pardner nudges me, an' whispers: "Mum is the word."

Because, mind yer, we was now beginnin' to see signs of mining. We met parties of 'em at work. We sees supplies a-bein' took up. We 'ears talk of payin' placers in the creeks and gulches of the Stewart, an' we 'eard of a Jew, Solomon Davis, wot 'ad opened a bank at Dawson City.

'Owiver, we goes on, and passes Klondyke River, and pardner gives me a nudge, but not a soul spoke, and nary a soul in the whole

party took no notice not at all, and not a mother's son of 'em guessed what we knowed, that thar the great solid bed of gold was—and is now, a quarry of it.

But we goes right by the Klondyke, the purspecting party wot 'ad ketched us up at the foot of the Chilkoot bein' bound for Forty Mile Creek, whar sum of 'em had been afore, an' was talkin' of wot they 'ad found, but it was nuthink like ourn.

Wal, we 'ad our las' camp together, us an' the purspecting party, in a pretty little island whar we camped, 'cos we thought p'raps we should be out o' the way of mosquitos in mid-stream. Everybody was all excitement, 'cos we was nearing gold. Our boats was all moored close together, an' we 'ad a game of poker afore turnin' in — 'cos now we didn't care one dump ef we was cleaned out of our las' cent. We knowed whar we could git some nuggets to trade with anyway. Pard an' I did a waltz afore turnin' in. We wuz as merry as flies. It'd taken us four year to get to Europe an' back—four wasted years. Now we wuz back in the land of gold, we was close handy to our own claim, whar we know'd the solid coarse stuff was. We wuz on the eve of bein' rich, an' we knowed it.

W'en mornin' come, the others was in sich

a hurry to git to Forty Mile Creek that they got on, an' we wuz jis' left whar we wanted to be, close to the Klondyke.

Wal, to conclood, the funniest thing occurs. I was very 'appy a-whistlin', puttin' all our stores in purfick order, cussin' the mosquitos, an' enjoyin' of the sun, thinkin' jis' a wee bit of Sally, who 'ad jilted me for Bill Ogg—bad luck to her! Oppysite, ther wos three log cabins on the hother bank, an' pard ses to me: "Jim, let's see ef we kin buy a sack or two ov flour—thet we kin take along."

So I went to one cabin, an' pard, 'e goes to the other, but they wuz both empty. So I knocks at the middle one, an' I ses: "Du anybody live h'yar?"

An ugly old woman comes a-scowlin' out, an' she ses: "I du," she ses.

"Yeur name?" ses I.

"I am the Widow Jay," ses she, "at least I 'ope an' trust so—ef not, bad scan to the masther!" she ses, bein' as Irish as a pig.

"Oh," I ses, "my pardner's name is Jay. Colonel Silas Jay. He's a-comin' along. This is 'im."

As soon as she 'ears me an' sees 'im, she ketches 'old of a wooden spoon orf the table, an', as soon as 'e sees her, 'e takes to 'is feet an'



'e runs to the boat at the top of 'is speed, she a-follerin' after.

She follers 'im an' jumps into the boat, an' she ketches 'im by the collar, an' she pastes in to 'im proper with ur wooden spoon, all the time a-slangin' of 'im in an Irish brogue, clack-clack-clack, like a mill-wheel. It wayn't no sham pasting she giv' 'im neither. She let 'im 'ave it, she did. She pelted into him. She giv' it 'im 'ot.

Now, du yew think we could git that thar widow to git out an' quit? Not by no manner of means. She wayn't no widow, she was my pard's own lawful missus. My pardner 'ad giv' her the slip four year ago, but she stuck to 'im now, an' she wouldn't leave—she wouldn't quit nohow. So we hed to take her along to our diggin's.

But lor! the conversytion!

No wonder them two cabins each side of 'er was empty! Nobody couldn't bear bein' anigh 'er. 'Er temper was just sour milk. Anyway, sometimes it was sour milk ontill she got narsty, an' then it was K. N. Pepper.

Still she made a good third, did Mrs Jay. She jis' bossed the Klondyke. She did so.

CHAPTER  
SIXTH

*AN EXTRA-  
ORDINARY WOMAN*

JAY and Platt, who constituted the firm afterwards so celebrated in the history of the Klondyke boom, were not now set on actual mining. They had no machinery, not even a jigger or a buddle; nothing to crush ore with, nor appliances with which to sink a shaft. Although they had struck a rich lode in the quartz where the "coarse stuff" was, and had established their right to a large claim whence ore of extraordinary quality could eventually be taken, they had for a time to be satisfied with washing the rich auriferous drift in a gulch on the Klondyke—the gulch now so well known as "Bowleg's Gulch."

Mrs Jay—ill though her temper was—assisted the two adventurers materially. Whilst they were cutting logs, she was not above helping to carry them. She worked as hard as any man when she chose, and it was

not long before a cabin was built, the "cut" dug, sluice-ways formed, and "tailings" all in order for working the alluvial. Nor was it any slight advantage to the two men to be relieved of the trouble of preparing and cooking their food, a duty which Mrs Jay performed admirably.

Whilst the two men were digging they became aware that a tribe of Indians had their eyes upon them. The news of the discovery of gold had spread amongst the Redskins, and a whole tribe of the Dog Ribbed Indians, who had roved and hunted, as their ancestors for untold generations had done before, throughout the wild and inclement desert on either side of those branches of the Rocky Mountain range which extend into the North-West Territory of Canada, and who had been almost undisturbed for centuries in their bleak and inhospitable country, now came to gaze at the dreaded Pale-faces. Canadian trappers and hunters and traders they knew; men who, like themselves, cleared the deer, the fox, and the bear; men who, like themselves, traded in skins and sold them fire-water. Brethren of the chase were these, though pale their faces. But who were these strange men now coming from the South, who dug in the earth, who were settling on many of their erst secluded rivers and creeks,

making dams like beavers, and fouling the streams which their salmon loved to spawn in? It was not with calm eyes that they watched the diggers and the placers. Angry words spread in secret from tribe to tribe, and soft footsteps followed the Palefaces even to the doors of the cabins where the diggers sat or slept beside their cabin fires.

The Paleface has long ceased to fear the Indian, or to regard him even as a foe. The fight has supposed to have gone out of the once brave itinerant aborigine. The race has become degenerate, and the surviving tribes are regarded as effete and harmless, except for their thieving. Doubtless, the advance of "civilisation," encroaching year by year upon the few tribes still left in these remote and ice-bound domains, tends to humiliate and debase even the nobler remnants of the Indian brave. Throughout the United States no red men are left but "skunks," degraded by whiskey, cheated, kicked, and "potted" by the superior race which surely and swiftly is driving them to utter extinction. But in the extreme and desolate regions of North-West Canada, the Hare Indians, the Dog Ribs, the Copper Indians, the Taismians, and still further north, within the Arctic Circle, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, the Esquimaux Indians have,

until this year of grace, remained. Degraded these are, too, in comparison with their proud and independent ancestors, for fire-water—that irresistible foe which is to them a deadly poison—ravages and decimates them. Yet, till now, these Northern tribes have retained more than a spark of their ancient courage and dignity, and all the astuteness, the cunning, the stealth, which centuries of experience as trappers, and fishermen, and hunters in a region kept as a preserve by Nature for wild beasts and birds has imparted to them. Is the discovery of gold to wipe out these lingering survivals of a great race also, even as their brethren of the South have vanished, even as the buffalo on which they fed?

No such thought occurred to J. T. Platt. All he knew was that a tribe of dirty gipsies, as he called them (with more correctness, perhaps, than the reader will be disposed to admit), were outside the cabin one morning when he turned out rather earlier than usual, and that they forthwith began, with many elaborate salaams, to offer skins for whiskey, and, upon refusal of that, to beg.

Their voices brought out Colonel Jay, who swore at them roundly and told them to begone, and soon Mrs Jay peered out, unkempt and with arms akimbo, storming

them, to whom the Indians made effusive and abject bows, and shyly held out their hands for bread.

An altercation then commenced, and eventually, a happy thought occurring to Mrs Jay, she offered them work at the sluices. If they chose to "take off their petticoats" and work, they should have whiskey, tea, flour, and a dollar a day a head. Mrs Jay had the thrift of several years put by, and, as her husband and Platt, in digging the cut, had already come across several sizeable nuggets, she, although originally sceptical and scornful, had caught the gold fever, and was prepared to stake her all in the venture.

This idea of Mrs Jay's was warmly backed up by the two partners—the two other partners, one might call them, as Mrs Jay had at once established herself as the head of the firm, and Platt was even more afraid of her than her husband was—if that were possible. Indians will fish, hunt, trap, or even trade, but work they will not, so the negotiations fell through, although the whole tribe still loitered near the cabin.

So Jay and Platt set to for their early morning spell. They had already dug the "cut," and were beginning to wash. There was plenty of water, and they had a wonderful



find before breakfast—three large nuggets, and a number of smaller ones close together, almost “conglomerate.” The Indians saw what was going on, and were holding a high palaver.

“We shall have trouble with them skunks if we don’t take care,” said Colonel Jay, when he went into breakfast, and he loaded his rifle.

They talked to “the missus” of their find, and the three big nuggets were placed upon the table. They lay there like golden fruit. Mrs Jay got quite excited, handling them fondly, weighing them in the palm of her hand, appraising their value, and expressing her fear lest they should be lost or stolen. As soon as breakfast was done, the two men wanted to put them in their pockets whilst they went out to work, but Mrs Jay secured them, scolding her husband, and hiding them away by dropping them in a pot of pickled onions. They had not been at work long before Mrs Jay came out and joined them. It was exhilarating work, and they were all so gay over it, for they continued to have truly wonderful success, that peace reigned all the morning. About an hour before noon, Mrs Jay went back to the cabin to get dinner ready, and Jay whispered to Platt that it was “wonderful what a change had come over the missus.” To which Platt

replied, with unconscious cockneyism of tone, that she was "A derved useful partner—no mistyke! Grub *and* gold ain't no or'nery luck. This gyme du give yew a happitite, derved ef et don't!"

They went on washing, but with many an exclamation. "Stri' me, Colonel! Look y'ere!"

"Gosh! Thet's nothing. Now, that's what I call a nugget, Jim," and a lump as big as a potato was held up.

It was sunny, too, and they were merry as crickets. The sluice they had rigged up consisted of a series of troughs made of rough boards on trestles, placed at a very slight slope for having abundance of water—they had intercepted a spring—they were able to wash the dirt very effectually; indeed, Colonel Jay, being a miner of experience, had fixed a false bottom with perforations and cross riffles in the sluice, and a good deal of small dust was thus collected. He could not expect that such nuggets as they had found early in the morning would occur often. Platt was singing and chirruping like a London sparrow, and the Colonel kept saying dry things, full of that sub-acid humour which all Americans seem to have ready on occasion, but they rarely interrupted their laborious work, even when

roaring with laughter. They were now engaged in throwing the wash dirt into the sluice, and their backs ached. Jay had to stop to stretch himself straight, when he saw on the bank beside the "cut" the whole tribe of Indians, silently watching their every movement.

"You derved skunks!" shouted Jay. "You jis' clar! D'ye hear. Git!" and throwing down his shovel, he shook his fist at them.

They shrank back a few paces, and in half a minute Jay looked up again: they were closer than ever.

"Now, you listen to me," said Colonel Jay, with that quiet deliberation which is never to be trifled with. "I hev' my Derringer here. If you don't quit, I'll shoot."

He stood looking at them with a calm gleam in his eye that they deemed dangerous. Slowly they shrunk back and moved away. In the distance behind was Mrs Jay at the cabin door. Hearing her husband's shout, she had left the pudding she was engaged in making, and came out to look around.

She realised the situation at once, and stood for some time watching. Now and then Jay, who felt the spell of her eye, looked up and glanced at her.

"Things air changing, Jim," he said in an

undertone. "I'm shouting, and the missus is silent. I didn't use to dare to speak."

"She ain't speakin', Colonel," said Platt, "but ain't she a-scowlin'! Oh no!" and he grinned.

They went on shovelling the wash dirt into the sluice. Platt picked up another nugget, the size of a small bean, which rang against his spade. The Colonel, who had not had a "find" for half an hour, slogged away jealously into "the material" harder than ever.

Then they both looked up, for they heard a cry. The Indians had again advanced, and the Colonel, drawing his Derringer, sprang up the bank, Platt following.

But the Indians were taken in rear. "The missus" had not been watching in vain. Seeing the obtrusive strangers again advancing towards the sluice, she had bounded out from the cabin, and catching the tallest of the braves by his ear, she was administering to him a sound drudging with a rolling-pin. It was his cry that the miners had heard, and now he lay still on the ground, stunned by her blows, but she had another by his throat, and was belabouring him without mercy. With a sudden wrench he escaped, leaving his blanket in her left hand, and all the troop took to their heels, but she was after them, and had yet another victim before they were in full flight. All the

while she was wielding the rolling-pin her tongue was abusing them roundly. She ran after them for a long way, whilst they fled before her like chaff before the wind, and when no longer able to follow, stood shaking her fist and shrieking threats upon them. As long as they remained within earshot she stood with her hair flying, flourishing her arms, rating them in her high, strident voice, and calling them all the vermin and skunks, and all the fusty names in her voluminous Irish vocabulary. Walking back, though they were out of sight, she stopped frequently to howl more curses upon them, and when her husband and Platt appeared at the cabin door, for it was about dinner-time, she turned her objurgations upon them, calling them a couple of curs to let a few skunks of Injuns hang about them whilst at work, so that whatever was found could be seen. Once excited, her nagging tongue never stopped, although the two men praised her openly for her defence of the camp. Indeed, they were in such excellent spirits that her incessant torrent of abuse for once afforded them amusement rather than annoyance, and they were truly and heartily grateful to her, for, as more than a week passed without the reappearance of the Indians, it seemed probable that they would give no more trouble.

So the two partners continued to work. All that they wanted was paid labour to become really and speedily rich. They took out so much gold in actual nuggets, that the missus was at her wits' end to know how she could securely hide them away. Many loose characters were about, and there was danger that they might be attacked and plundered at any time, so their rifles were always kept loaded. There was not any one place sufficiently safe in Mrs Jay's opinion where she could stow the swag; she hid it, therefore, covertly in various pans and baskets, and Silas and Jim would occasionally find their nuggets a second time at the bottom of a bowl of fresh eggs, or in the corner of a biscuit tin, the laughter which saluted these re-discoveries bringing down upon them a volume of vituperation, accompanied sometimes by the sound blows of the termagant's toasting-fork, or such other culinary weapon as she had in hand, her favourite being a heavy iron spoon.

This was a weapon for which she had other uses. On the cleaning-up days Mrs Jay would take her place at the sluice, and the two men would lazy for a few hours, and loll by the edge of the cut, smoking in the sun to keep off the mosquitoes, or perhaps go into the woods in search of game. The missus was then



accustomed to take up the riffle bars in the sluice, and scoop up the gold dust with her spoon. This she placed in a pan, and, subjecting it to a thorough washing, separated all the gold which she carefully stored in some odd hiding-place.

Everything now went so smoothly that all they wanted was more labour, which could nowhere be obtained, and Mrs Jay repented that she had so effectually driven the Indians away.

“But I’ll find such skulking vagabonds as them!” she exclaimed, with a flourish of her spoon. “Shure they’ll be loiterin’ about where the gold is—bad scran to ’em!—smokin’ an’ dozin’ away their lives—the thieves. Faix! is it our work they mean to fatten by intoirely, the stealin’, slippery blayguards! I’ll make ’em work. You lave it to me meself. You lave it to Biddy Jay—bad luck to her name!”

The idea of Indians working was too much for Silas, and he laughed his scorn.

But this extraordinary woman effected that miracle. They were not difficult to find, but they were shy, and shy especially of Mrs Jay. However, with the aid of whiskey they became more approachable, and eventually they succumbed. To the surprise of the two miners she led a whole dozen of them one morning

into the cut to the sluices, and set them to work, under a contract with their chief, one Leather-tongue, at a dollar a day, and a glass of whiskey each if they worked well.

Mrs Jay herself superintended them with a loaded gun, and she watched them very closely indeed, not forgetting to search every man of them at the end of each day's work—for they are adept pilferers, and it is not difficult to hide a nugget.

Well watched though they were, no doubt, they did thieve, but the general average of their yield was a gauge of their honesty, and their work showed results which paid our adventurers well.

Jim and Silas working in their midst, or behind them, had them in view, and the missus in front, had her sharp eye upon them continually. Still thefts occurred under their very eyes.

Almost every man of them had been discovered in the act of theft one day, and the yield was much below the average.

Before they were allowed to go into camp for the night, Colonel Jay summoned the men. He did not waste words. With the assistance of his wife and partner, he searched each man thoroughly, one by one. Quite a haul of gold was the result; it was secreted about them everywhere.

Then the Colonel spoke, with a freedom from the Yankee colloquialisms into which he dropped when talking with Platt—for he was an educated man, and when in his serious moods spoke correct English.

“Leathertongue, chief of the Dog Ribs, and you Blackhand, his son, and you also, Indians, my brothers, it is the law amongst white men in all parts of the world where they flock to find gold, that if any man be discovered in the act of theft, he is forthwith hung to the nearest tree. The next man who steals I shall hang.”

Before noon the next day a wretched man was discovered secreting gold in his mocassins. For days afterwards his body dangled from a solitary pine which overlooked the gulch.

That was how the first pioneers on the Klondyke dealt with the labour difficulty.

## CHAPTER SEVENTH

## *A RAID ON THE GOLD*

“**I**’VE a dhrop of the rebel in me meself, for I’m Irish to the core, an’ a soft heart for all rebels. It’s meself I’m tarkin’ of, Jim Platt, but divil a bit of the rebel have them skunks of Injuns in ahl their tarnation skins at all! Ochone! They want a firm shtr-r-r-r-ong hand to make thim work, the lazy divils! an’ thin they’re all asleep intoirely. Get up, you spalpeens! it’s afther sunrise; an’ if I catch ony ave ye thieving I’ll shtring ye up, for it’s me cord I have ready. Oh yis, an’ yis, an’ yis. It’s Mrs Jay a-tarkin’ to ye—bad luck to her for changing her name from Biddy O’Grady!”

It was a lovely morning, and the bright, clear air was full of scent of pine. The brown rocks of the hills showed every tuft of grass, and every scar and stain of moss or lichen a mile away. The muddy waters of the Klondyke River looked bright and blue in the dancing sunshine, but there was a crisp, autumnal

sharpness in the smell of the morning that boded the approach of the long, long winter.

The Indians, roused from their slumber, got up lazily and stretched themselves.

"Begorra! It's the precious toime I'm thinkin' av intoirely, an' not thim lazy skunks, at ahl, at ahl!" said Mrs Jay to her husband, whose grizzled head now peered out of the cabin. "Och, ye bag-o'-bones! You only jis' up, an' here it is the middle o' the mornin'. There's Jim a-settin av ye an example, washin' in the sluices this hour or more, more shame to ye, Silas Jay! Ye can smell the winter in the cowl'd air, Silas—ye varmint!—this marnin', an' it's carryin' the gould safe into Selkirk I'm thinkin' av, ye sleepy-eyed ould blackguard! Faix, would ye lave it hid here all the winter among these thievin' Injuns—the dirty vaga-bonds!—an' have all our labour stole, begorra?"

Colonel Silas Jay seemed to be of the same mind as his wife. No doubt the winter was approaching fast, and it would be well to carry in to store all the dust and nuggets they had already taken. The gang of Indians whose labour they had hired had been suspiciously docile of late, and their patience under Mrs Jay's vituperous tongue and scathing blows was in itself suggestive and threatening. Their conduct of late had been too perfect, their work

exemplary, and the silent disappearance of one of their number was inexplicable.

They were in doubt what to do. They had got out a lot of gold. Early and late had they worked all through the spring and summer, and the tribe of Indians whom they had employed had enabled them to put thousands of cubic yards of dirt through the sluice, so that their takings were heavy. Jim Platt had been over to Dawson City—which was increasing marvellously day by day; houses, stores, and *caches* were springing up like mushrooms—but the price the Jews were offering for pure dust and bullion nuggets was absurd. There was a store at Selkirk where a better price could be obtained, or there was the alternative of going right away to Seattle, 2640 miles distant, which involved the voyage down the whole length of the Yukon River to St Michael's, and then the sea voyage across Behring Sea and along the coast of Alaska into Washington State. Long though that voyage was, it was safe and easy, but it involved their being away from Klondyke during the winter, and that was not their plan. Jay and Platt had come to stay.

The two men discussed the position as they worked together at the cut. They had recently noticed the strangely good conduct of their



Indian labourers, and they entertained suspicions of them. When Silas went off to breakfast he winked at Platt, and, burying a very large nugget in the pay dirt where he had been working, beckoned to Leathertongue.

The Indian chief came up salaaming.

"Now look hyah, see you," said Silas, "we air going to breakfast. Just take along and shovel up this dirt; there ain't likely to be much in it excep' a little fine dust, but just put it in the pan an' wash it through, an' then you go to your breakfast—only wash this first, mind yew."

"They can't miss that nugget, Jim," said Silas Jay, going off with his arm on his partner's. "They must come to it, an' they must know they can steal it easy. No Injun could resist stealing a nugget like that. If they hand it over it means something ugly; it means they intend having not that nugget only, but all the gold we've took. It means that Saginaw—the cove who deserted Thursday—has gone to bring a score of others to raid our camp. Don't let on to the missus."

They went in to the cabin and breakfasted. They had coffee, salmon, onions, excellent bread, an omelette—Mrs Jay had a poultry-yard behind the cabin—and some small sour apples.

Silas talked about moving the gold, and said all the hidden nuggets would have to be got together soon. Then the two men lit their pipes, swore at the mosquitoes, which are a perfect pest on the Klondyke, and went back to the cut.

"I thought so," said Silas. "Look at that sneaking skunk, Leathertongue! There will be some ugly business soon."

The Indian chief was approaching, his teeth, dyed black, all smiles. He bore himself with accustomed dignity, holding in his hand the large nugget—the same one that Silas put there—and some smaller ones besides, newly discovered.

"All from one pan, great master! Big fader lump—little children lumps—much gold lumps," and he bowed obsequiously, and kissed the Colonel's hand.

"Ah! honest Injun," said Colonel Jay, although, prepared as he was, he couldn't conceal the sarcasm of his inflection. "Go to breakfast, my good Leathertongue. Most worthy Leathertongue! Most honest Leathertongue!"

Then, turning to his partner, he continued:

"What did I tell you, Jim? Now, if he had stuck to that nugget I'd have forgiven him. He looked real nice, and bland, and guileless, didn't he? The sly rogue. Ah! you can bet

your bottom dollar they mean raiding us ; they mean having every speck of gold we've laboured for and paid them for getting. It's our lives we shall have to look out for as well as our gold."

"Wal, Colonel, I guess we'd better clar. Let's make tracks right away for Dawson's. Though we shan't get the half of what our stuff is worth from that derved old Jew, Solomon Davis, we kin convert it into paper and bank it safe away."

"An' we can soon get thar."

"And back, Colonel."

"And back, Jim, as you say. There's all winter to come, an' though old Solomon won't give us half the worth of our takings, we shall soon be back taking out more. Eh?"

"We air both of one idee, pardner. Wal, thar's my shovel. We needn't lose not a derved minit—nary a one! Let's pack up."

"And let's load up, too, Jim. I'll tell the missus. We'll jis' pack up the bullion and treck, as we used to say in Buluwayo."

Quietly, and without any fuss or trouble, Colonel Jay and his wife brought out the golden harvest. It had already been carefully sewn up in sizeable parcels covered with blanket. Some contained fine gold dust only, other parcels consisted of rough lumps like

sifted gravel, and the nuggets were sewn up in a sack, corded several times across, and then covered again with skins. All these were now placed in blankets and tarpaulin, and large bundles were made up, each of about the weight that a man could conveniently carry. As soon as these were packed they were piled up together outside the cabin, and Mrs Jay herself sat on the top of the heap with a loaded rifle over her shoulder.

The Indians, who were unaware of the sudden intended departure of their masters, were still at work at the sluices, and the bottom and riffles had not been taken out for some days. Jay and Platt, each with an empty jar in one hand, and a spoon in the other, went down to spend an hour or two in clearing up. After that they would go without delay. Mrs Jay was not to get a regular meal for them. They would have biscuit and milk, and they would lose no time any way. There was possible danger in the air, and it was not far to Dawson City.

They took the perforated bottom out of the sluices, and scooped up and washed the gold that had collected there. There was some in the tailings, but they decided to chance that. It would be there probably when they returned. If somebody stole it—well, better lose the tailings than the whole takings.

So they came up out of the cut. At the edge of it stood a stranger—a Jew.

“Another lot of ye here, eh? Holy Moses! What a lod of gold there is about this Yukon River!” said the Jew, looking up and down the gulch. The Indians looked up at the sound of his voice, but took no notice of the intruder.

“Who air you?” cried Jim Platt, with one hand on his Derringer.

The Yank said nothing but he drew his.

“Pud ’em down, gents—pud ’em down! I hev’n’t got so much as a pop-gun od my whole d’body. Nod a weapon of any sort, so help me, Moses! I’m ath harmless as a babe!”

“Stop your prating and say who you air.”

“Nathan, my tear—Isaac Nathan of Selkirk. Nobody touches Ikey Nathan. Vy, you couldn’t live withoud me! I’m the best margid about here; all the diggers knows Ikey Nathan. You works—vell, I banks it. Got much, eh? Thad’s bedder; pud away the pisdols.”

“Then, if yew air a banker I guess it’s welcome yew air to Bowleg’s Gulch—and that’s me,” said Jim Platt, looking at his nether limbs, which were rather bandy. “They wouldn’t stop a pig in a passage, they dew say.”

“But this ain’t the way from Selkirk,” interrupted Silas, suspiciously.

"Bless ye, my tear, of courthe it ain't. I hev'n't come from Selkirk. I'm lookin' round to thee the boys. I've bin to Circle City, and Forty Mile Creek, and Dawson's. I'm lookin' out for bizness. Dad's all. Vy you air clearin' to go. Got much, eh?"

"So so."

"Vere air you goin' to tague it? Dawson City? No! Holy Moses! Nod to Misder Davis. He won't give you a third of wod id's worth. Solomon Davis is the worst margid for diggers in Alathga. Show me vod you've got."

"Well, mate, why shouldn't we deal with this man, anyhow?"

"Why not, Colonel, if he air honest. I reckon we want tew git best valew for our swag. That is our only consarn. Wot air your terms, Mister Nathan? Thet thar is our little heap."

"Holy Moses!"

"Yis, et's a tidy pile, Mr Nathan. An' wot will you buy that for—hyah as it stan's."

"No, I'm dot dealing. You brig it id to Selkirk, an' I'll give you de best price in de margid. I'll give you ten dollars an ounce for pure colour—if it ain't pure it depends on assay. Dere can't be nothin' fairer dan dat. You tague it into Selkirk. Don't go to



Dawson's. You would be foolish to tague it to Dawson's."

So, with more talk of that kind, the diggers decided they would go to Selkirk instead of to Dawson City, and that they would start without delay. Silas summoned Leathertongue, and gave orders to have the picks and shovels carried into their wigwams, which were to be left standing. Nobody was to be left in charge. They were to go to Selkirk right away by forced march, and get there as soon as possible. The Indians were to feed and be ready in an hour's time.

This sudden decision, and the haste with which they were to proceed, did not suit Leathertongue. He raised all sorts of difficulties, and, when it was time to start, all the tribe were squatting round their camp fire, and had made no progress at all towards departure.

"You stir 'em up, boss," said Silas to his wife; "the sooner we start—the sooner we reach Selkirk."

It did not take Mrs Jay long to make them stir about. She had one of them, Petchwahwell, by his ear, and, dragging him to his feet, slung one of the packages on to his back. Having started him, the others were got into line, Platt standing in front of them all, with two loaded rifles over his shoulder,

When all were ready to start Leathertongue still hung back talking to Blackhand, his son. He and his tribe had agreed to work in digging and washing at the places, but it was not part of their contract to port and carry sacks to Selkirk. The statement was true, and the argument just. Silas reasoned with him, pointed out the necessity of carrying their treasure before the winter set in—explained how it was the custom with Palefaces to exchange solid gold into a convenient symbol by means of paper and writing—the value remaining, and the security increasing—although there would be no more weight to carry, and all would be represented by a little document that could be put in the waistcoat pocket, though it might be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. This intensely interested Leathertongue, and much time was consumed in explaining it to him. Still the Indian argued that, in the eyes of his brothers, the Palefaces, a contract was a contract, and he appealed to the Jew on that point. The Indians laid down their packages and gathered round, joining in the palaver. When Leathertongue was exhausted Blackhand renewed the argument. Platt looked up at the sun. Time was fleeting.

“Yes. Well. But why so much haste?”

argued Leathertongue. Besides, it was too late to start for so long a journey so late in the day. Better leave it till to-morrow and start at sunrise. What did Mr Nathan think?

Mr Nathan thought that as there was no contract on the part of the Indians to become carriers, and as it would be a pity to have such a valuable load in the hands of unwilling porters, it would be best if one of the two partners went to Dawson City to try and secure some other porters.

This idea, which if followed out would have gained two or three days to the Indians, was warmly applauded and led to new discussion.

All this debating occupied till noon, and Leathertongue called off his men to their mid-day meal. This was a long affair, for they had somehow lit the fire with green wood and it kept going out. The afternoon was wearing and still they had not started. Silas began to think it would be better to give way to the murmurs of the Indians, and arrange to go next day at sunrise amicably; to let them spend the remainder of the half-wasted day smoking and dozing before the camp fire, in the lazy fashion that the Indian loves, and to salve them with whiskey and tobacco.

"Tabakky!" exclaimed Mrs Jay, whose

patience was exhausted. "I'll give 'em tabakky. An' you, ye blind-eyed ijiot! you a trapper! A foine trapper, an' ahl! Ah, and down't ye see the thrap they're layin' for ye entoirely! It's to gain toime they're wanting, and to lose toime. Oh yis, an' yis, an' yis! I understan' their maning—sure it's clear enough! And where's that dhirty, sneaking, divil, Saginaw, if he hasn't gone to raise another thievin' tribe to come raiding the camp, murthering us ahl, and robbing the gowld—and why delay at ahl, at ahl, but to wait for the tarnation thieves! It's playing their game we are, Silas, you blind-eyed owl! And as for you, ye spalpeen—you narsty, schemin', hook-nosed Jew!—I down't like the looks of ye at ahl, ye blaggard!"

"Right you air, boss," exclaimed Platt, addressing Mrs Jay by the title she deserved. "I was a-guessin' jis' like yew, this hyah delay's a ruse. Git up, you Injun niggers, you schemin' varmints! Git up, now, an' port them skins. Eh, what, you won't! Wal, then, the boss and me, we'll make you."

Laying down his two rifles Platt unhinged the dog-whip which he wore round his waist, and, cracking it two or three times in the air over Leathertongue's head, touched another of the Indians on the flank. The Indians saw

that the Palefaces were not to be trifled with any longer, and with sullen looks and murmured threats they shouldered the baggage which had been assigned to them.

When the start was made the sun had already sunk low, but, once under weigh, the lethargy of the Indians was permitted no longer. The moving of the large quantity of loose gold, which had been secured after so much labour and hardship, was obviously a task of difficulty and danger. Silas and Platt were armed to the teeth, and Mrs Jay not only carried her share of the load, but a rifle was slung over her shoulder, and her waistbelt was stuck with pistols. Leathertongue and the three other red men went first, groaning under the weight they were forced to carry. Then Platt followed, keeping his eye upon the men in front. Then four more Redskins, including Blackhand, captained by Mrs Jay. The Jew, Nathan, unarmed, and carrying only a light burden, was also of her party; the remaining Indians followed, and, behind all, marched Silas, his cold grey eye surveying the whole gang.

The track from Bowleg's Gulch involved climbing at the very beginning of the march, and now it was obvious that the plan of the Indians was to separate the gang, but Silas was on his guard against this. The word was



passed that the men were to be kept together, and the Indians were warned that if any attempted to break away from the rest, or to steal off with the treasure, he would be immediately shot. The Indians had been carefully searched before starting, and had no weapons with them. The partners knew that their enterprise was a difficult one, and the circumstances warranted a strict and armed oversight. They were attempting to carry into Selkirk a very heavy taking of the precious metal, and even if they were not raided *en route*, it would not be an easy task to prevent some of the Indians at least from furtively making off with the treasure they carried.

After having traversed some miles of rocky wilderness, a halt was called, and moose-meat was served out all round. The various packages were examined, for a thought had occurred to Silas that the carriers might be artful enough to shed the contents of their burden at some spot they might afterwards recognise, and bear the wrappers only into Selkirk. But they had not yet resorted to this device, and the value of the packages remained at present intact. The moon had risen, but it was yet low, and after a short rest they proceeded on their way, Jim enlivening the journey with a modern variety of so-called comic songs, sung in a



tone so doleful that a humour was thereby imparted to them which the words themselves lacked.

They now came to forests, and although the moon was bright, the thick growth of pine and fir obscured the light, and they had to trust to the Indians and follow in the darkness.

Silas was on the alert, and again ordered a halt. For a while they proceeded in close, single file, their line not being allowed to exceed a space of four or five yards. So they journeyed for many miles through the thick growth. Sometimes Silas took supreme charge, sometimes his wife or Jim Platt. Occasionally one of them would go to the front, and, standing aside in the gloom, would count all the men as they passed some moonlit glade in the forest.

In time, the route they were taking—there was no path—trended suddenly down hill, the trees were sparser, and the undergrowth more scanty, but the moss, which grew so high that their feet sank in it below their ankles, was full of moisture. But for this, Silas would have ordered a long halt for the night, yet they plodded on, although the Indians were beginning to show signs of fatigue.

Now the route became broken and rocky, but the moon was by this time high above

them, and though the gang was more extended, there was no chance of any one escaping, for the air was clear, the night quite bright and cloudless, and all the men could be seen for a long distance. The turbulent waters of the Haha River were now visible, glinting two or three miles away in the moonlight, and the roar of the rapids could be distinctly heard. Silas decided to push on and cross the river before camping for sleep, although Leather-tongue began to complain that his men would drop through fatigue. In order to prevent these complaints from being pressed, Platt hurried on with his advance gang, and a space was also kept between the party captained by Mrs Jay and that under Silas's immediate control. Jay and Platt, fortunately, knew the route well, for the Indians made a pretence of not knowing the ford, hoping, by this means, to create a long delay, and the fact of their pretending ignorance on this point, in a country which they had scoured for generations, was an additional proof that they meant mischief.

However, as Leathertongue and all his tribe assumed to have no knowledge of the ford, which was quite an easy one, Silas permitted them to demonstrate their falsity, then, heading the file, he led the way across himself, and,

assembling them for the night, rallied them in a good-humoured speech, telling them quite frankly that he knew they meant treachery and theft, but that the first man who was up to tricks would be instantly shot.

They were now assembled on the banks of the Haha, at a spot quite suitable for camping. The packs of gold were stacked, and upon them Mrs Jay quietly stretched herself at full length for the night. A meal of dried meat and a ration of whiskey was served. Platt went into the higher rocks where he could command a view of the camp, and having flourished his rifle, quickly went off to sleep, as had been quietly pre-arranged, for Silas mounted guard and kept a particularly sharp lookout till sunrise.

By noon next day they had made a forced march of nearly thirty miles, which, considering the nature of the ground, the heaviness of their burdens, and the unwillingness of the carriers, was admirable. Silas decided to have two hours' mid-day rest. Mrs Jay guarded the camp, sitting astride the bags of gold, whilst Platt and Silas slept. If the Indians thought they could take advantage of this opportunity, they were mistaken, for she kept her keen old Irish eyes on every man in turn, and if any one of them showed signs of restlessness she

levelled her rifle at him immediately, and opened upon him a volume of abuse from her inexhaustible vocabulary, which was even more terrifying than the levelled barrel of her gun.

Again they resumed their journey. Silas, gaping after his short sleep, left the main duty of surveillance to his wife. They went on with occasional brief halts till long after nightfall, and when they eventually camped for their night's sleep, a long distance seemed to have been placed between them and danger.

Platt was on guard for the night, and took care not to sleep a wink. There seemed some restlessness on the part of the Indians, and the conduct of Blackhand was peculiar. He had certainly a knife in his hand, and was moving stealthily towards Silas. Indeed, Platt was sufficiently suspicious to let off his rifle—not to injure the Redskin, but to alarm him and arouse his companions. Immediately the shot was fired everybody jumped up, but it seemed to be a false alarm, and morning dawned without further disturbance.

By sunset of the third day they had accomplished all but ten miles of their journey; they were, however, footsore and weary, and they had the arduous task before them of threading

Selkirk beach—where the loose boulders and pebbles are fatiguing to pedestrians even when free from burden. Our travellers, however, were full of good spirits, for they had done better than they expected, and the especial danger they had feared now seemed unlikely to happen.

So they pushed on. At any rate, an ambush was out of the question, and the peril they had dreaded most—the peril of an attack from armed Indians in pursuit of them—would have now been deemed absurd, if it were not that Leathertongue was again making desperate efforts to cause delay. He could go no further; his legs would not carry him. He had a thorn in his foot; he was weary and past further travel; the burdens were beyond the power of his men to bear. The Redskin had not the strength of the Palefaces. A long rest was now a necessity. The more obedient of his tribe followed his example. They all murmured. They laid down their packages; they could not or they would not move. They were deaf to orders, deaf even to the objurgations of Mrs Jay, whom they certainly feared more than either of the two men; in vain did she scold; in vain were promises of increased reward held out to them; in vain were the most terrible threats. The men declared they were utterly



done and could not resume their march until they had rested—and there seemed some warrant for their excuses, for the Palefaces had to confess to themselves that they were nearly as exhausted as the Redskins declared themselves to be. Silas, however, was still of opinion that Selkirk could be reached by midnight, and in view of the immense value of their treasure, he disliked to contemplate any risk of it now that they were so near the goal. Mrs Jay was convinced that the men could be made to take it in, and after serving out the last of the whiskey, she entreated, cajoled, and threatened the men until their stolidity angered her beyond endurance, and she had resort to her whip.

But even the lash did not effect her purpose; budge the men would not. They whimpered and murmured, but nothing would induce them to move on.

Platt gave it up altogether, and Silas sat down on a rock begging Mrs Jay to try no more, when the travellers had a piece of unexpected luck.

Some strangers met them who were on their way to Dawson City.

They were going there to make it their headquarters. They intended to make placer claims somewhere round about, because, if



gold could be got at Forty Mile Creek, why not elsewhere, in some of the other rivers and streams flowing into the Yukon.

They had with them picks, pans, shovels, and provisions for the winter, also a good lot of stores that they meant to trade at Dawson's. They were a firm—they were. All staunch partners come to make money—as best they could. Yes, that was their canoe—the *Saucy Jane*. She had carried them all the way from Lake Lebarge. They were carrying her now—and this was Saucy Jane herself. They were well known all the way up. They had come through the White Pass. Everybody knew them as the *Saucy Jane* boys.

And who was Jay, and the lady, and Platt, and the Jew, and all these Indians?—and would they have a drink?—and what had they got in all their baggage?

Metal, eh?—aw! Ah! Ammunition. Ah! A heavy load!

So they talked—half a dozen at once and altogether. Jay and his wife sat on the heap of treasure, and Platt, reclining on a rock, was holding out his cup which one of the new arrivals, several of whom stood around, was filling with whiskey, Saucy Jane was seated by Platt, with her hand familiarly upon his shoulder, and the two gangs, meeting so happily

in the forest, had thoroughly fraternised, when a loud whoop sounded close in their ears, and the crack of a rifle, followed by a regular volley, came from the thicket. Three of the *Saucy Jane* boys, who were standing about, fell.

In a second Jay was on his feet. From three sides came loud yells and shrill cries, mingling in a howl and a war whoop, and into the open space dashed a whole tribe of Redskins, firing as they advanced.

Colonel Jay's first shot killed his man. Platt was a sure aim, and ably seconded his leader. They both carried repeating rifles, and the Indians fell like flies. One of the *Saucy Jane* boys, not knowing how skilful Mrs Jay was, had seized her rifle, and was doing execution with it, regardless of the abusive tongue of the virago. An Indian, stealthier than the rest, advanced in the shadow, and was raising his weapon, but Mrs Jay shot him dead. The attack had failed. The surprise was turned into a defeat. The shrill cries ceased. The Indians showed their backs, and the *Saucy Jane* boys were after them. Pistol shots echoed in the forest.

In the excitement Platt and Jay followed, using their Derringers with deadly effect. Then they hurried back to look after the

treasure, but Mrs Jay was astride it, spreading her petticoats over it, like a hen covering her nest. Ten paces away the corpse of Blackhand sprawled on the ground, his fingers clutching one of the packages of gold. The rest of the Indians had fled.

Explanations followed. The *Saucy Jane* boys came back wondering. Raid! Thought Indian raids were things of the past. Treachery! Gold! What? All them thar packages gold! Sakes! No. Stan' away! Poor Hiram! Poor ole pardner! Dead, by God! Bullet clean through his heart. Ah, Bunting, an' you? Thank Heaven not so bad. But a bad wound through your neck, Bunting. Serious? Should rather think so. Ah! Washington, my boy, you we shall pull through. Wash it with whiskey. Water! bring water, mate, and a pillow. Softly, pard—softly. How the pore chap bleeds!

“Faix! the divils are stealin' round agin. I heard a footfall. Begorra! There, Silas,” and the woman fired in the direction of the sound which had arrested her attention.

The boys rushed again into the darkness. The Jew, Nathan, was disappearing in the shade of some firs, and would have made good his escape but Mrs Jay did not lose sight of

him, and as she denounced him in smoking hot Irish, Colonel Jay followed the direction of her finger, and in a few minutes brought him back trembling with fright, and protesting his innocence.

But the men's blood was fired. Their comrades lay dead and dying upon the ground. It was no time for justice or for mercy. There was a short altercation in which the Jew's guilt was made sufficiently clear. In a few minutes he was hoisted to a tree, and his corpse, dangling over the heads of the camp, swayed to and fro in the rising wind.

All now turned their attention to the two wounded men, one of whom was dying, choked by the flow of blood from the wound in his throat. Nor did he last long. In less than an hour's time he lay white and ghastly and almost bloodless, for the shot, which was his death, had pierced the main artery. A handkerchief was thrown over his face, and his body moved from the red pool in which he had lain.

The third man's injury was not serious, and after bandages had been applied, he pronounced himself a cure, and although his wound was more dangerous than he knew, he pooh-poohed it as a trifle, and went about with the others, doing what he could, until his mates prevented

him, and made him lie down on a pillow of dried moss.

Conversation eventually returned to the carrying of the treasure into Selkirk. Colonel Jay wanted it in without delay. It was dangerous to life to dally with it on the way. Everybody was wide-awake after the excitement of the fight. If the *Saucy Jane* boys would leave two of their number with the wounded man, and the rest would turn porters, they should have a hundred dollars apiece to assist in carrying the swag to Selkirk.

But the wounded man wouldn't be left behind.

So with little further delay they were off, singing, shouting, laughing, and uproarious. Saucy Jane was crying, for she had been very fond of Hiram, and all the boys were keenly sorry for both the lost men. Vengeance on the whole tribe of the Dog Ribs was sworn in many a fierce oath, and a vow was taken that if Leathertongue were found, no matter when or where, he should have short shrift.

They reached Selkirk before dawn, and stood guard over the gold outside the door of the North-West Territories Office. Isaac Nathan's Bank was a fabrication. The Jew was unquestionably in league with the Indians, and had led them away from Dawson's for plunder.

But they had no difficulty in finding a market for their gold, and though the price paid was below value, they were well satisfied, for, as a result of their summer's labour, they had netted no less a sum than 300,000 dollars.



CHAPTER  
EIGHTH

HOW SANDY M'QUEEN  
PAID HIS RENT

THE secret was out. The first haul of gold taken from the Klondyke was so enormous, the nuggets were so large, and the find so rich, that the news of the discovery spread far and wide. In Selkirk, every man, woman, and child in the town saw the great pile of glittering metal with their own eyes. For two days it was on view at a merchant's store, but it created so much excitement that it had to be guarded by a detachment of the North-West Territories police. Arrangements were then made to send it from the dealers under a strong escort to Fort Cudahy, whence it was transferred to a steamer and passed down the Yukon to St Michael's. Thence it went by the ss. *Portland* to Seattle, and there again excitement raged. News of the unlimited treasure left behind also circulated, and was telegraphed to the ends of the earth. There was amazement at this Arctic treasure, and at

the conviction that the greatest gold-fields in the world had been found in this bleak, inhospitable, and almost inaccessible corner of the world.

From Forty Mile Creek, from Dawson's, from Circle City, places comparatively near to the Klondyke River, flocked those digger pioneers, who were able to contend with the difficulties of Arctic mining by reason of their equipment for the work and the climate. From Seattle and a score of other settlements, from camps on the Stewart and Lewes Rivers, from Juneau, even from Vancouver and Washington, crowds pushed their way to the new El Dorado in spite of hardships and dangers at which the bravest might quail, and when the news was unquestionably proved, Klondyke had become a name and a byword in the world, and from every city in Europe, and every centre in America, the strong, the poor, the unemployed, the adventurous, the ne'er-do-weel, sent a quota to that terrible region where Nature guards her treasure behind gates of ice.

The rich—for such there were—soon turned back because money could not buy their essential needs ; the strong—if strong in mind as well as body—pushed on, but often failed by the way ; the adventurous and the heroic fought with Nature, step by step, through the White

Pass, or over the fearful and famous ascent of the Chilkoot, through the Grand Cañon Rapids, and so by the lakes to their frosty haven, but the poor, ill-equipped, enduring hardship and privation beyond the strength of man, eventually, almost inevitably, succumbed, and died on that dreadful unmade road of frost and hunger.

For a few days, Jay and Platt, the original pioneers of the Klondyke, stayed in Fort Selkirk. They had been so long toiling at the sluices that the sight of a few white faces made them weep with joy, and the noisy gaiety of a drinking saloon an irresistible delight. Mrs Jay, the heroine of the Klondyke, was treated to "a dhrop of the Irish" so often that "she got a jag on," and after pasting her husband with a broken bottle, and spoiling the beauty of Saucy Jane by pulling enough of her hair out to stuff a pillow, she was carried off by a drunken gang of "the bhoys," and deposited amongst some empty barrels, where she was left to sleep in alcoholic bliss, with a bottle of "comfort" beside her, to be ready to her lips when she awoke. Saucy Jane soon followed suit and was laid by Biddy's side, and bets were made as to which of the two would first wake up to go for the bottle. "The bhoys" sat up night after night at poker, with stakes of gold dust on the table. The talking, hoarse

laughing, and hard drinking all progressed together; there was furious gambling, oaths were hot and constant, and, for emphasis, they had six-shooters. A free fight broke out, the table was upset, the floor was littered with packs of cards and broken glasses; all the men were drunk and the women maudlin. There was a row about a mirror accused of cheating; it was probably innocent, but suspicion doomed it to destruction. A bottle of champagne was hurled at it, and there was a smash; chairs and empty casks were hurled about, the gold dust went flying. There was a general crash and scramble, horrible oaths and hysterical shrieks mingled in the bedlam of din, and the sharp crack of a pistol, echoed by a score of answering shots, and fierce voices, betokened grave mischief. There was a lull. A stream of blood, pumping from a man's chest, ran in crimson channels, soaking into the sawdust, when the police came on the scene and cleared the bar.

Then the pioneers, Jay and Platt, went back to Bowleg's Gulch. But already a crowd was there. Miners from Circle City and Forty Mile Creek had flocked to Klondyke. Men who had been digging gold in the Yukon district for years, and who had been getting it in no inconsiderable quantity, threw up their claims to work on the Klondyke River. The

gold was there in wonderful richness. One man washed out of one pan no less than 500 dollars. The fact was vouched for by a Government official, and telegraphed the whole world over, for nothing like that had ever been heard of before in the history of gold mining. Nothing like the marvellous haul which Jay and Platt had carried into Selkirk had ever been known even in California or Australia. The wealth of Klondyke came on the financial world as a great surprise, and the proof of the wealth heralded it.

The excitement caused by the news of the find was equalled by the rapidity with which men flocked to that almost inaccessible spot. They established themselves upon the banks of the river, fitting up sluices and making cuts "in less than no time." The change that came over the face of the landscape, the clearings in the forest growth, the "caches" and log-cabins that sprang up as though by magic, were the natural consequences of the new mining craze—but they were none the less astonishing.

None were more surprised than Jay and Platt. They had left the Klondyke a desolate and lonely river—even the canoe of the Indian was rarely to be seen, abundant though the salmon were known to be in its swirling



waters—its banks were an utter wilderness, untenanted, remote even from the casual footstep of the trapper.

During the entire summer they had been absolutely cut off from human intercourse except with the tribe of wandering Indians whose labour they had hired, and their absence, whilst they were in Selkirk, had been but for a few days. In less than a fortnight they were back again at Bowleg's Gulch, and the change in the aspect took their breath away. A mushroom city had sprung up actually upon their claim; a saw-mill had been established close to their own cabin; the forest was dotted with clearings; the merry click of the axe resounded through the woods; the ground was littered with poles and fallen trees; rival stores were doing a roaring trade in coffee, tea, bacon, cheese, salt, sugar, axes, nails, spectacles, and all kinds of commodities. A whiskey saloon was in course of construction, and casks, where liquor was sold, stood close by, outside a tent on which was inscribed:—

“M'QUEEN'S BAR.”

“FORTY-ROD WHISKEY, a dollar a drink. Champagne and cigars of the choicest brands. Gold dust taken in exchange at \$17 an ounce.”

A pile of wine cases stood on end, stencilled with the name of Perrier Jouet, 1884.



Even another more marked change had occurred in the short space of their eventful fortnight. Winter had set in. The air was chill and raw. Everybody wore fur, there were fires everywhere, and the dense smoke from the green wood filled the valley.

"Blowed if this ain't a transformation scene at the pantomime!" said Platt, looking at the landscape in amazement. "Ther'll be blue and pink fire directly, a yaller dragon, and the ladies of the bally. W'y it's Droory Lyne!"

"Wot I'm thinkin', pard, is this," said Colonel Jay, voiding his quid: "these chaps air on our claim."

"Yuss, an' they're tykin' our gold," said Platt.

"But et doan' matter, Jim. The more that comes, the better for our royalty. We hev got the title-deeds to all this, an' whoever works on our land must jis' pay us; besides, thar'll be plenty of labour for the winter. All we hev to du now is tu look on. Our old motto's again a good 'un—'Mum is the word.'"

So for a day or two Jay and Platt did nothing but look around. They visited every camp, and inspected the diggers who were all as busy as bees, not taking notice of anything but their work.

The stores were doing a great business, and

the saloon-keeper, Sandy M'Queen, who had engaged all the labour he could get, was making great progress with the erection of his building. Every hour it increased in importance; the floor was now being nailed down, and a bar was being rigged up, Jay and Platt looking on with relish.

On the third or fourth day, at dusk, the *Saucy Jane* boys came into camp. They knew Jay and Platt as the pioneers of the Klondyke, and knew, too, what a huge haul they had made during the summer, for they had helped to carry it into Selkirk, so that in an hour or two Jay and Platt became universally known and respected. To Colonel Jay the time seemed ripe to assert his claim—an act that might lead to some trouble. Through the *Saucy Jane* boys, a report was spread that there would be free drinks an hour after sunset, at Sandy M'Queen's saloon. Hooch was to be on tap.

So everybody flocked to the saloon. Sawyers and carpenters were still at work in the light of flaring oil-lamps. M'Queen, with a chisel and hammer in hand, was unpacking a case of tin cans behind the temporary bar consisting of planks on barrels. Colonel Jay strolled in with a quid of tobacco in his cheek, and sat down as cool as a cucumber on a wine case. Platt was with him.

"Them thar's the two that made the find," whispered a voice in the crowd. "They've been hyar days, an' done nary a stroke. Three hundred dollars—thet's the figger o' thar strike."

Said Colonel Jay: "An' it's free drinks you want boys, eh? Wal, you kin hev 'em. Walk in!"

A crowd stood at the bar. M'Queen was smiling like the sunshine in June.

"Jim, just knock the head off that case. Help yourselves, boys. Pomery and Greno's '84 is the tackle. Guess it takes some beating."

The diggers soon had it out. Bottles were in every hand, corks popped in all directions, and the cups, foaming with the froth of champagne, went gaily round.

"Now, boys, success to our saloon! That air a fair toast, I reckon. Success to our saloon, an' to Klondyke!"

It was drunk uproariously.

"Boys, I will jis' tell you. Since me an' my pard made our first find miracles hev happened. Everything seems extro'rnary. Our luck—why, it's mi-rac-u-lous! The solid gold what my Pardner Jim an' me took was wonderful. But when we came back hyar, our luck was still luckier. You see this hyar saloon? It's a pretty saloon now, ain't it?"

Colonel Jay looked around at it admiringly. It was far from finished, but it was stoutly built as far as it went with sawn trees and fir logs. Sandy M'Queen, with his arms on his hips, and his chest swelling, looked it up and down also, his face beaming with smiles.

"Wal! did we build this saloon? Nary a log. Did we pay for it to be built? Nary a dollar. No. It fell out of Gawd's Heaven on to our land, jis' as you see it now. It's mi-rac-u-lous!"

A cloud of perplexity seemed to gloom over M'Queen's face, and his smile vanished. Colonel Jay glanced at him for a moment, and continued :

"Fill up, boys! Thar's plenty more bottles in the cases. Here's tu you all! Here's luck to you an' to Klondyke!"

The toast was drunk uproariously. Everybody's cup was filled and emptied in less time than it takes to tell it. The floor of the saloon was littered with empty bottles.

"Yu see, that's our luck. This saloon is our luck. We just find it here on our land. Built up for us without costing us a red cent. It's got the name of M'Queen outside it, but no matter for that, it belongs tu Jay and Platt."

"Wad ye jus' saäy thaät ower again?" ex-

claimed M'Queen, in a broad Scotch accent, with a dazed look on his face.

"Did you not hear me?" asked Silas Jay, in a tone of exasperating calm.

"I heared ye, mon, but I dinna ken wha' ye mean."

"Mane!" cried Biddy Jay, appearing at the doorway, with a saucepan in her hand, which she brought down on a barrel end with a sounding whack. "Mane! My husband spakes what he sis, an' what he sis he manes. This bar doesn't belong to any dirty Scotsman, begorra! It's the property of Jay & Platt."

"Ye owd scarecrow!" cried Sandy. "I built this saloon mysel'. D'ye want me to tak' it awa?"

"Not a log of it," said Silas Jay calmly. "Everything on this land is ours. You may pay us a rent and stay, or you kin clar out an' git. Only, if you du go, you leave the saloon behind for the reasons I hev said."

"Oho!" exclaimed the Scotsman, "and how maun I ken ye are the reet man to tak' the rent?"

"This hyah paper bearing the stamp of the Dominion an' the seal of the Gover'ment, is our title to this land, and all so ever upon it. Thar's four posts—north, east, south, and west of it. Them posts, an' this paper, marks the

boundaries of Jay & Platt's little bit of territory, an' any one working on our claim is welcome so to du, as the paid hands of our firm at five dollars a day. Boys, I will take another drink with you."

The response was not quite so cordial as before. Mrs Jay stood scowling in the doorway still, and it gradually began to dawn on the minds of many of those men there present that they had possibly settled on land to which Colonel Jay might have a prior claim. They began to whisper amongst each other ominously.

"Boys, there need be no fuss," said Colonel Jay. "We hev been here years, an' we hev found whar the gold is. We hev worked hard for our own. Some of you hev settled on our land. Wal, no matter fur that. What you've took out till now you may keep. Also, you may remove your barrers, your skips, your sluices, and your trestling—or our firm will buy 'em at a valuation. You kin stay thar an' pay us a rent, or you kin stay an' our firm will pay you wages for what you find—five dollars a day—or you kin clar out an' git, an' you can squat somewhere else on the Klondyke. I cayn't speak no fairer than that. The *Saucy Jane* boys are quite satisfied to work for me; they're goin' to take their five dollars a day.



They'll start tu-morrer, an' what they find they'll hand over. Come along, Jim, come along, missus—an', boys, good-night!"

A hubbub arose as the partners left the men to stomach these tidings, but there was not a very great deal of trouble, as it happened. The example of the *Saucy Jane* boys, who were not only out of funds but short of actual necessities, and who were consequently quite willing to work at the rate of wages offered them by Colonel Jay, was largely followed. Many of the miners preferred for the time being to take a regular wage, and some even sold their wheelbarrows and trestles, so that the pioneer firm was soon in control of a large gang of men who were digging on various parts of the property, thus enabling the partners to test the value of several areas.

Now that the cold weather had set in, it became necessary to thaw the ground continually. They had to melt the frozen dirt in the pan. They had to melt the earth itself before they could dig it, and deep down though they went they still had to thaw the frozen ground. Roaring fires were kept up all over the camp, and the glow of burning faggots enabled the men to work during the dreary hours of the long Klondyke night.

M'Queen, the Scotch bar-keeper, was the

only one who was disputatious. The miners had already begun to pay for drinks in gold-dust, and the shrewd purveyor of whiskey foresaw a harvest for the saloon if he stayed. But to pay 3650 dollars a year rent—the amount which Jay & Platt had fixed—was gall and bitterness to the thrifty Scotsman.

“Ten dollars a day!” exclaimed M’Queen. “It’s owre much! I winna pay it! An’ if I’d only pitched the hoose a few hundred steps further up I should have no sic rent. Nay, not a bawbee at all, an’ no landlord. I’ll tak’ it doon, log by log, an’ build it oot o’ th’ auld pieces again.”

“Yu cayn’t du that,” said Colonel Jay; “the logs air off our land, therefore they air our logs. It’s our bar, land, and logs—the whole b’il’in’.”

“Ay, ay, Colonel Jay. That puts you further awa’. I’ll lave the hoose and build anither, an’ nivver pay a bawbee for rent to ony mon.”

“Then our firm will run a saloon hyah ourselves.”

“You canna,” said M’Queen angrily; “you have eneuch to do getting the dross wi’out managing a public.”

“I shall put in Mrs Jay as boss, and engage Saucy Jane as barmaid.”

"They'll scrat each other's eyes oot," said the Scot. "That young lassie will have a' the lads glegging at her, syne your guidwife—the ugly hussey!—aw, I canna tell ye for the laugh ahint my heart a-choking me at sic a thocht!"

Suddenly the Scotsman paused and grew grave. "Aweel! I'll consider it, Colonel. I'll let ye know the morning."

Then he turned and went off savagely. Pausing after a few paces, he turned fiercely: "Ye're a dour mon, Colonel Jay. I sair doubt ye'll no be saved at the Day o' Judgment. Damn ye for a magerful body!"

When Colonel Jay went into the saloon next day, M'Queen looked up at him out of the tail-end of his sandy eyelashes.

There was a twinkle in the glance, and the Yankee, who had all the American love of driving a smart bargain, wondered what it might forebode. He cast a look around, observed a new rough pinewood counter and other fixings, and reckoned with smart quickness that the Scot meant to stay. He determined not to budge an inch, nor to reduce the rent a single dollar.

"Well, Mac, hev you considered?"

"'Deed I have, Colonel Jay! I am settling to stay. It's a good pitch, an' a' the lads ken I sell the reet stuff, but I shall want more

land around. A bit yard, maybe—a place for casks—room to add, if need be, wi' a stable for the sleds and dog-teams."

The Colonel turned over his quid in his customary silence.

"Nows and nans the laddies get to drinking, an' a bit of a singing saloon for the long winter nights, and it may be a bit o' groun' for a summer gairden——"

"You air foreseeing, Sandy M'Queen."

"Ay—ay mon! Wad ye hae me as blind as a mole? Aweel, let's mark oot the boondaries. Three thousand sax hundred and feefty dollars a year! I'm daft to think o' sic a rent! Ah! God have maircy upon ye, Colonel Jay!—ye have none on me. Will ye tak a liquor the now?—though it's the landlord's reet to pay."

"Let's first slosh out the lines of your holding, M'Queen. You want a block of land for the kegs? That's only fair—drive in that post, eh? Now take it fifty yards. What, no tape? Wal, I guess we kin step it."

"Make it saxty, mon—make it saxty!"

"Guess that will do," said Colonel Jay, taking an additional stride or two.

"Eh, mon, mon! had ye nivver a mither—or was she a hard ane, too? Tak'

anither step or twa. Here, gi' me the post," and M'Queen, suiting the action to the word, carried the stake three or four yards further along. "Shall that be the boondary? Ay."

"Not a yard further than that," answered Colonel Jay, bringing the stake back a pace or two, and driving it in with an oath. "And now for the south side; I'll pace out a hundred and fifty steps."

"Nay, mon, I'll step it mysel'," said the Scotsman, who forthwith proceeded to step it with strides that nearly split him in two at every pace. The Yankee watched him with an amused smile.

"Now come back ten for over-stepping," he shouted.

"Ower-stepping!" echoed M'Queen foolishly, "I didna ken I ower-stepped."

"The post goes in thar!" said Colonel Jay decidedly, striding back a few paces.

"Ye're a hard man, Colonel Jay," said M'Queen, shaking his red head sorrowfully. "Let me mind you it's not siller I'm paying for rent, but gowld."

"An' it's not siller yew will be taking for drinks but gold—an' nuggets at that," replied the Yankee smartly. "An' thar you air. Theer's year four posts. One, two, three,

four! See? Thar's your boundaries. Now, let's liquor."

"If I pay for these two drinks, Colonel, wad ye move the two end posts just a wee stride further oot?"

"Not a derved inch!"

"Ye're ower muckle magerful, Colonel Jay. A bit more land——"

"Yu bet them four posts is druv. Not a bit more land shall you hev, M'Queen. Yu can pawn your soul on that!"

"There'll na be room for the wee shed I'd be building for the teams o' doggies."

"Then put 'em in the cellar."

The Scotsman's shrewd eyes glistened.

"Ye'll not be mindin' if I dig oot a cellar?"

"Ye kin dig down to hell," replied the Yankee, with an emphasis which is usual in the conversation of Klondyke miners. "Inside them four posts you kin du what you like, but not a yard outside the boundary. Is that a bet?"

The Scotsman looked at the extended hand of the Yankee and held up his own persuasively.

"Ye'll mak' the rent even money—three thousand dollars, Colonel Jay? Tak' a drink noo an' dinna be tight. I'm gey auld, an' flour fifteen dollars a sack, an' claothes are



dear on the Klondyke, an' whuskey tak's gettin' to this driech hole. It's no' a' profit."

"I reckon it ought to be even money, Sandy M'Queen. I reckon the rent of this shanty ought to be four thousand dollars a——"

"Four thousand dollars! Mon alive!" interrupted the Scotsman in genuine surprise. "I meant ye to knock aff the sax hundred an' feefty—an' when ye said even money I meant three thousand dollars—an' that will starve me."

"Four thousand dollars would be a fair rent, but I said three six-fifty. That's ten dollars a day, an', if I move from that, God strike me dead!"

M'Queen bent his head at the shocking blasphemy. The fight was over.

"We'll have no parchment on this deal, M'Queen. Gi'mme a whiskey straight, an' if it's a bet thar's my hand. If it ain't I'll stand you a drink an' you kin git. Air that fair?"

"It ain't fair, Colonel—but——"

"Air it a bet?" said Colonel Jay with a decisive oath.

M'Queen took the extended hand and gripped it. "It's a bet—and a bargain," he said.

Then he laughed.

There was something of meaning in that

laugh. It was a complacent, not to say a crowing laugh. M'Queen was at least well satisfied.

"Faix!" cried Mrs Jay, who had been hovering about during the whole deal, "the Scotsman seems mighty plazed with his bargain. Perhaps he'd like to make it a permanent dale for twinty-one years."

"He may if he likes," said Silas solemnly.

"Verra weel," said Sandy; "so let it be. I'll not turn up my nose at the owd woman's suggestion," and he laughed again.

"Ould woman it is, am I?" cried Mrs Jay bridling. "Shure I shall be young enough to boss you, Sandy M'Queen, when the rint day comes due. Ye'll howld a civil tongue in that Scotch head of yours when I come collecting the rint. It's an ould Irish woman you'll find me thin, Sandy M'Queen, but young enough entoirely to have my due."

"The rent will be aye ready," said Sandy with another laugh.

"Mac!" said Colonel Jay, looking into his tin cup stolidly, "there's suthin' sarcastic in yeur laugh thet makes me think I've been done over. But if you hev bested me in this deal I am content. Thar's my hand."

"Colonel Jay," replied the Scotsman smiling still, "I just can't keep it to mysel'. I want

to pay you your rent right away now—you or your ould woman. Although it is the Sawbath Day, hand me yon pick."

The pick-axe was handed over the counter, and M'Queen, spitting on his hands before commencing, set to work with a will on the ground the other side of the bar. It was not floored over. The earth was soon loosed and he laid aside his pick for the shovel. In a few minutes he hauled out a great nugget, then another and another.

"This is what I came to accidentally when I was building the counter," exclaimed M'Queen. "The ground is just paved with 'em solid. It's a fine cellar I'll be having, though I'll not dig so deep, Colonel Jay, as you gi' me title to, ah!—an' I've got the rights of it for twenty-one years! There's another lump of the stuff. Weigh it up, mon! Weigh it up, Mrs Jay! Tak' your rent oot o' that. I can pay your year's rent in half an hour's digging, an' I hope, madam, I say it civil, if it's a drop of whuskey ye'll be takin' noo, shall it be Scotch or Irish?"

CHAPTER  
NINTH

*BOW-LEGGED JIM'S  
MARRIAGE*

THE original discoverers of the Klondyke had become rich "beyond the dreams of avarice." But though they were richer than they dreamed, and richer than they knew, they were still unsatisfied. The ore itself was as yet untouched. To quarry and mill this was now their great aim.

The vast wealth of Messrs Jay & Platt was soon noised abroad. Travellers from great engineering firms, with the characteristic enterprise of the Anglo-Saxon trader, had surmounted the incredible difficulties of the journey, and had come to Klondyke on purpose to take their orders.

The partners decided they would lay down machinery and plant of the most approved type, and they gave their orders for stamps, and mills, and other appliances on a spirited scale that

amply repaid those enterprising travellers for their long and perilous journey.

Meanwhile the partners had to proceed as best they could without machinery. They were busy from day to day superintending their properties, and they had plenty to do in furthering the aims for which they now lived. Our various ambitions give interest to our lives. One would be rich, another powerful, another famous. This man looks over his neighbour's hedge every day, and is watchful for years to gain his neighbour's field; that one waits for half his lifetime to fill a dead man's shoes; and what is your petty dream or mine? But whether our aims be small or great—and the greatest of them are so puny, that they make laughter for the gods—it is our ambitions only which make life endurable.

Colonel Jay, intent on being rich, had no care for anything but the making of his pile. Platt, who had stumbled casually into wealth, but who had never yet experienced the joys of even a moderate competency, or comfortable income, repaired frequently to Dawson City, desiring only to enjoy the elusive cup of happiness, and willing and ready to squander a tithe of his earnings in gambling and saloons. All he wanted was fun. But the opportunities for fun were few and rare in the twenty-two

hours of darkness which form a substantial portion of a Klondyke day. Drinking, cards, and dancing were the only joys of Dawson City. The drink was bad, the cards were dirty, and the dancing dissolute. Any one of these might bring a man to ruin, but Saucy Jane, having certain designs on this eligible bachelor, became his good angel. Having been temperate for many years, and possessing a sound constitution, Platt was able "to lift his elbow" pretty freely without apparent inconvenience. At cards he was "a rank duffer," but, thanks to Saucy Jane's candid tongue, he knew it, and thanks to her influence, he refrained from very high play. Besides, he had worked for his wealth too hard, he had endured privations in his poverty too severe, to squander his money like a boy.

Dancing was his especial weakness. As soon as Abe's fiddle began Bow-legged Jim had his arm round some woman's waist and was gyrating in the mazy waltz, or hopping through a polka, or, best of all, airing his susceptible heart among the changing partners of a square dance. He cut a queer figure, but he had an ear for a tune, and a nimble pair of feet, notwithstanding his bandy legs. He caused a great deal of chaff and amuse-



ment amongst the denizens of the low saloons he frequented, but as he was known to be rich, he had many flatterers who ministered to his good-humour, large store of which he had by nature; and Saucy Jane, whose original regard for him was rooted on a financial basis, eventually came to like him for his strong good sense and his many excellent qualities. He was lavish in hospitality, and generous with money, and all women like generous men. They know there must be something for them to acquire, and they dream of acquiring all there is.

Women have strong mining instincts. Indeed, at heart, all women are diggers. They love to scrape up the gold if they do not care to wield the pick. But man is the mine they work. He is so much "pay dirt" in their eyes. How will he "pan out"? What is there in "the cut"? Will the gold run well through the sluices? Will it collect on the riffles freely, and dribble nicely through the perforations? Can they make "a placer claim" on him, or are there "conflicting claims"? Or is he stony, difficult to work, hard-grained, obstinate in the ore? If a woman looks with curious interest at a man she is not thinking, be sure, of his straight nose or his large eyes, she is reckoning up how many ounces he will

grade to the ton, and how she can effect a "big strike." God bless all women!

For this care of the sex of our belongings is very beneficial to us all. Women take care of our purses better than we can do ourselves, and Saucy Jane, having decided to take care of J. T. Platt's, staked out her claim in the precincts of his pectoral region, and eventually conducted him to the altar.

Their wedding was an open-air event, for there was no church either at Dawson City or at the gulch. But a parson was discovered amongst the miners; although malicious rumour said he had absconded to Klondyke with the subscriptions for a proposed new church. Whether this was true or not cannot be proved or contradicted, but it can be safely stated that he brought none of it with him to the camp. He was the poorest man on the Klondyke, and, at that date, the only gentleman. He had already started a subscription list, of course, but at the present there were no names down on it except his own.

The ceremony was solemnised gaily outside M'Queen's saloon. There was not half room enough inside for the crowd. A mob of miners, clad in fur up to their ears, stood in their india-rubber boots in a great circle on the frozen snow, chaffing and hustling each other in

their efforts to get a front view. Fires were blazing away everywhere, and the smoke was thick and heavy. It was dark and even dingy overhead but as the twilight came, the flickering lights of the Aurora Borealis began to wave and flutter in the northern heavens. Pink, green, and violet flames shot up into the starry sky, lighting the horizon, and rendering visible even the distant waters of the Yukon, which shone beneath the brilliant flames of the Aurora with a roseate sheen. In the light of the waving ribbons of the Aurora, the miners' lanterns paled their ineffectual fires, and the ceremony was performed before the whole camp. All the Bonanza was there.

The bride, arrayed in a low-necked dress of white satin, procured from one of the saloons at Dawson City, with a long tulle veil, and orange blossoms in her hair, shivered by the bridegroom's side. But she wore a necklace of nuggets which created such a warmth of envy that she was careless of the cold. Jim was in mixed attire. He wore a white waistcoat, from the pocket of which suspended a heavy gold chain, but he had thick fur clothes underneath the vest. He had managed to procure somehow, at a fabulous price, a tall top hat, but his bandy legs were encased to above the knee in miners' jack

boots. The parson had donned a regular clerical garb. It is wonderful what one can get at Klondyke, or anywhere else, when needs must. Colonel Jay was his partner's best man. There was a paucity of women in the district, but everything of the feminine gender for miles around was there. There were costumes, too, such as have never been seen even in Regent Street. Saucy Jane had no false pride, and two notorious ladies from Aaron Goschen's saloon, gorgeously arrayed in light blue satin, acted as bridesmaids. Their noses were blue, too, owing to the cold, but their cheeks were a most expensive pink, for only one pot of rouge could be got, and that had to be sent for to Circle City. There were no flowers but they made up for it in feathers, and had enough of these to supply all the Princes of Wales for many generations.

Mrs Jay, although a married woman, insisted on being an additional bridesmaid herself, and threatened to strip the other women of their finery if some wasn't forthcoming for her. It was duly provided, and when she was fully arrayed she formed a sight fit to make glad the heart of man.

There was a hitch at the commencement of the ceremony because no prayer-book

could be found anywhere, and the parson could not remember the service. Abe, the fiddler, scraped out some waltz music, but this seeming inappropriate, as lacking solemnity, somebody, who had a concertina, struck up one of Moody and Sankey's hymns which had a refrain that the miners sang heartily; and then a Bible was discovered and handed up to the officiating clergyman; from this a psalm was read. That concluded, there was a pause, for the question was what came next. Jim produced a ring, and the clergyman, remembering the effective part of the ceremony, said in a sober voice :

"James T. Platt, wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her, in sickness and in health, so long as ye both shall live?"

"Forsaking all other," exclaimed a voice on the fringe of the crowd, "you have omitted that, 'forsaking all other, keep thou only unto her.'"

"I will," said Bow-legged Jim with fervour.

"Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health, and, *forsaking all other*, keep thee



only unto him so long as ye both shall live."

"I will," said Saucy Jane, her eyes twinkling. "Jim, give the gentleman the ring."

So the ring was put on Saucy Jane's finger, with the appropriate words, and the man with the concertina wound up the ceremony with a tune, Abe accentuating such parts of it as caught his ear upon the violin.

As soon as the concertina lulled, the *soi disant* parson held up his hand in sign of silence, and producing a bag from the tail of his coat, he solemnly announced; "This service will now conclude with the usual collection." His announcement seemed to be quite in accordance with propriety, and nobody seemed in the least astonished; so he quietly went round the circle, which was beginning to dissolve, holding out his bag, into which many small nuggets were dropped, for there was a lack of coin on the gulch, and this was the usual currency.

Then there was a great deal of handshaking, and embracing, and kissing of the bridesmaids, even Mrs Jay allowing this salutation from a favoured few, and M'Queen's saloon, which was crowded before, was packed full and jammed tight with noisy miners. Champagne corks began to fly. M'Queen was having a



glorious harvest. Nuggets were raining into the bar. Barrels were set on end outside the saloon in the snow, and a new bar was extemporised to deal with the crowd who could not be accommodated within. Free drinks were announced by order of the bridegroom, and whiskey flowed like water. Songs were sung, especially those with choruses, and "Home, sweet Home!" was twice encored; but whilst "Father wouldn't buy me a Bow-wow, Bow-wow!" was being chanted, the man with the concertina, who was playing the accompaniment, came to a dead stop, for some one had whispered to him that the wedding breakfast was in progress. The rumour quickly spread, and there was a rush to the log-cabin specially erected for the occasion. Those who could not get inside picnicked outside. There was plenty and to spare, but it had to be scrambled for, because there was a lack, not so much of waiters, as of plates, but various joints were brought out, hunks of which were cut or torn off and handed round.

The speech-making began before the breakfast was half over. Bow-legged Jim, a Cockney to the core, was as glib as butter in responding for the bride. The health of the bridesmaids, proposed by M'Queen, was drunk enthusiastically, and there were loud calls for

Mrs Jay. She had got rather mellow, and was on her feet at once.

“It’s a bride meself I was, an’ shure it’s not long ago when I married that man, an’ bad luck to him! or I might have had Bow-legged Jim to my own. Shure he’s the best partner av the two av ye. Faix! an’ why should I be a bridesmaid at ahl, at ahl, ye’re axin’. Have I anything to be ashamed of for bein’ an honest woman?—an honest married woman, plaze the pigs! Bedad! I’m fitter to be a bridesmaid than thim two bridesmaids from Dawson City!”

(Disturbance.) “Ah, ye may well put your hands over their potaty-traps! Howld their tongues, the sassy jades! It’s mey meself a-tarkin’, an’ she’s a clane-mouthed woman, is Biddy Jay! I wouldn’t hev them be spakin’. Begorra! It was enough to hear that dirty Scotsman, Sandy M’Queen, beslaverin’ them in his slimy spache! I repate it: I’m fitter for a bridesmaid than either the pair of them together! Besides, that man,”—here Biddy shook her finger at her calm-visaged husband,—“that man, Silas Jay, ran away from me for five year, an’ I was his widder all the time. There’s not a woman in the room can say as much, and as for Saucy Jane herself—begging her pardon—it’s Mrs Platt, I mane——”

“Set yerself down, Mrs Jay,” exclaimed the

bridegroom tactfully, springing to his feet with alacrity. "Boys, here's to Mrs Jay! There eyen't another like 'er on the tarnation airth—an' thank Gawd! Sandy M'Queen, you will second that?"

"The vairtue of Mrs Jay," said the Scotsman, rising with ponderous solemnity, "seems to give bairth to some distairbance. Ye winna listen. Och, but ye a' ken she's a spunky woman—a woman o' sperrit! There's a mash of people in the saloon, an' I canna hear mysen talk if ye mak sic a din. Sit ye doon there by the door! What's all the fluster for? The mair I—— Eh, are ye a' fou syne the last toast? Wha's that, mon, ye are a-carryin'?"

Everybody in the room had risen to his feet, for some commotion had been caused at the door, and a man was being carried in—a man so weak and pallid that his white face attracted everybody's eye.

"Sit down!" shouted a score of voices at once. But the hubbub increased.

"Sit down!" exclaimed Colonel Jay; "stow all this flap-doodle! What's the matter with—Eh! the man's starving, you say. Who? Forty of them! What, the whole provision gang? At Crystal Creek! Forty hours ago! They'll be lost to a man!"

The breakfast party broke up. The news that reached the gulch was terribly grave. The provision party, on which they depended for their winter needs, was lost in the snow. A disaster of dire gravity had happened, and the men whose fate was questioned in this hour of festivity were probably already dead.

All was excitement at the gulch. A relief party was immediately organised. Colonel Jay at once sent off a pioneer gang of half-a-dozen men. They left the camp on sledges immediately, taking only the barest necessities—blankets, a stove, brandy, and biscuits. Colonel Jay followed with another gang an hour afterwards, with provisions, tents, ropes, furs, snow-shoes, and all sorts of articles that seemed likely to be required.

Now, Crystal Creek is only ten miles from Bowleg's Gulch, and, in summer-time, progress by that route is feasible. Not so in winter. Its waters, wonderfully clear and comparatively warm, renowned for the fish which may be seen sporting in its green depths, are fed from a number of springs bubbling from the bottom of the creek, and the surface rarely freezes, except with a thin coating of ice. The provision party, unaware that this thin ice is rarely strong enough to bear, had made an effort not simply to cross the creek, but to

travel down it on the ice. At the portion of the creek on which they had started the ice is stronger, and, travelling at a good speed, they had traversed this part of it when the first sledge suddenly fell through—dogs, and men, and stores, and sledges, precipitately, never a vestige of them being seen again. The second sledge—there were three in all—following close upon the other, pulled up quickly at the sudden disappearance of the first, but they, too, were immersed, and every man and dog of them were drowned. The third sledge, being some little distance behind, pulled up in horror, but although the ice was strong enough to bear them whilst they were proceeding quickly, it gave way when they halted. Their sledge and dogs soon foundered, but the men, a number of whom accompanied the sledge on foot, mostly wearing snow-shoes, made desperate efforts to save themselves. The majority of them, however, fell through the thin ice, and though they struggled bravely to get out, the ice invariably broke as they endeavoured to flounder out of the water. At last, exhausted by repeated efforts, the greater number of them, one after another, succumbed. Beneath the thin, treacherous surface there was a very rapid current, so that once in the water, there was little chance

for them. The current bore them further and further away from the stronger ice, until eventually they were borne lower down the creek, under a surface that became thinner and thinner, until eventually it brought them into that portion of the creek which had no frozen surface at all. So it was that their strongly equipped party, with the provisions intended for the camp on the Klondyke, were lost. A few only, managed to reach an island in mid-stream, and one who gained the further bank was able, although terribly exhausted, wet through, and frost-bitten, to reach Bowleg's Gulch, and to announce his fearful story of disaster.

This is the true account of that awful calamity, but the man who brought the terrible news of it could not tell whether any but himself were saved. They had now reached a time when it was light only for one or two hours in the twenty-four, and soon it would be perpetual night. He had come on to the gulch in the darkness, finding his way after failure and difficulty, and had more than once despaired of ever reaching his destination.

When Colonel Jay reached the scene of the disaster he believed that every one was lost. He divided his men into several separate



parties of three, who searched up and down the Creek, shouting and waving their lanterns, and then listening intently for any reply. News was at last brought to him that answering voices were believed to come from Safety Island—as the place was afterwards christened, it had borne no name before. The voices on the island were again heard, or so it was believed. The question then was how to reach the men whom they hoped were there. There was no boat or canoe of any kind, and it would take too long to build one. An attempt was made to send a rope across by shooting an arrow with a thread attached, but the distance was too great, the island being beyond bow-shot. Trees were felled, cut into logs, and a paddle improvised. Each log was then manned by a volunteer, and launched into the stream, but this expedient failed, as the current was very strong, and every log swirled past the island, in spite of manful efforts to reach it. A peninsula of ice jutted out into the stream, and the logs, one after another, when floating down, were arrested by this point of ice, but the current then mastered the ill-equipped navigators, and invariably deflected the course of the logs, so that they were floated past the island. But it was now certain that two, if not three or more men were there. The

sledge was forthwith lightened of its load, and by means of logs a raft was in course of rapid construction. It required nothing more than to be corded to the logs. Whilst this was being finished, news came to the rescue party. Platt now arrived with his newly-married wife. He brought information that eight men of the wrecked provision boys had reached Bowleg's Gulch. They had witnessed so much of the disaster to their mates as the darkness had permitted, and had heard the cries and shrieks of the drowning. They were well behind the others, and terrified by the shouts of their unhappy mates, they had abandoned the endeavour to cross Crystal Creek at all, but making a detour, they had reached Bowleg's Gulch by the Beaver Dam—a route which had brought them into Bowleg's Gulch in forty-five hours. Platt having welcomed the party left them in charge of M'Queen, and, horrified at this terrible confirmation of the news, hurried off at once to join Colonel Jay and the rescue party. His wife, Saucy Jane, insisted on coming with him, and they had accomplished the journey quickly in a sledge.

“When did they arrive at the gulch—these eight men?” asked Colonel Jay.

“Three hours after you left—dog-tired they

was. Not so bad as the first pore chap, but terrible weak they was."

"And you left them with Sandy M'Queen?"

"And with Mrs Jay, Silas. Lor! You wouldn't hev knowed 'er. She was that affeeshshunit and tender to 'em. She was their own mother to the eight of 'em—nursin' of 'em, giving 'em brorh an' brandy, wrapping of 'em up, an' coddlin' 'em. Lor! Silas, she's a treasure, is Biddy Jay."

"What d'ye think I got spliced to her for if I didn't know that," exclaimed Colonel Jay with a frown. "But who's looking after the camp? Who's minding the gold?"

"Why—your missus is, in course. She's allus the boss. Never you mind, Colonel. Look here! No sooner 'ad she done a-coddlin' up those eight men—pore fellers!—than she was orf roun' the camp with her wooden spoon. Ah! she's a treasure, she is. She goes to every camp fire on the gulch. She does so—a scoldin' 'ere, blazin' away there, and layin' on with 'er wooden spoon, jist like her own nat'ral self fust time I saw 'er. The gold's all right; she's a-watchin' of it. An' not only that. What do you think now, Colonel? What do you think? She's a thoughtful one, she is. She ses to me: 'If all the provisions

is lorst, Jim, 'ow would it be jis' to 'op over to Dawson City an' buy up hevery sack o' flour, an' hevery side o' bacon you can lay hands to, for purwisions will be dear if this disaster's true. Thar's a fortune in it! Yis,' she ses, 'an' be quick abart it, or else Sandy will step in fust, an' I don't like bein' second fiddle to Sandy M'Queen.'"

"Wal, Jim, that's for the future. I can't think of making fortunes now. I'm thinking of these pore chaps—God help 'em!—on the island."

"Wot are you doin' of, then?"

"Making this sledge into a raft."

"What for?"

"To get across to thet island. There's three or four men there—all that's saved of a score or more."

"Why don't you get a rope over to the island?"

"We can't. It's too far."

"And you can't paddle over?"

"That's what I'm going to try to do with this sledge, but the current is so derned ricketty, I fear we shan't manage it."

"Then, why don't some one walk acrost the ice?"

"It's too thin. We've been trying it. Two or three of us have had a ducking over it. I

wish we could. A boy might do it—a light weight, but it would be risky.”

“I’m light ; try me!” said Saucy Jane.

“You!” exclaimed Colonel Jay, looking the frail little woman up and down with the lantern in his hand. “Wal, you air a saucy one, you air! Get away! you ought to be on your honeymoon. This is no place for women—especially brides. It’s a cemetery. It’s chok full of dead bodies—only we can’t find ’em.”

There was a pair of skates in one of the pockets of the sledge, Saucy Jane—or to term her by her new name, Mrs Platt—was already quietly fastening these to her little feet. Over her shoulders she slung a long coil of stout twine.

“Jim,” she called to her husband, “catch hold of the shore end of this coil, and when I signal you fasten it to a rope, and send the sledge over. You understand?”

“Sakes no! I jis’ don’t understand, Jenny. Whar air you a-goin’ with them skates on?”

“To the island,” cried Jenny, laughing gaily. “When I wave this lantern you’ll know I’m thar.”

Snatching up a lantern she was off. Jim ran after her but she was too nimble for him. She was a good skater and struck out boldly. The ice cracked ominously as she started.

The men, crowding to the edge of the ice, saluted her with a loud cheer.

"Merciful Gawd!" exclaimed Jim, sinking on his knees, "she'll be drowned for a moral! Come back, Jenny, come back, my awn darling! The ice won't bear, you little fool. Come back! Ain't thar enough drowned already?"

But she was skimming over the ice in the darkness regardless of all warning. They watched her in intense excitement, visible now in the distance by the light of her lantern.

"She may reach it, Jim," said Colonel Jay. "Pray Heaven she may. She's a light weight. But——"

"May happen she'll skim across before the ice has time to crack under her," said one of the bystanders, endeavouring to reassure her distracted husband, for he was nearly frantic with apprehension, and he had to be held back or he would have followed in a fool-hardy effort to accompany his plucky little wife.

"She's by the big hole now whar t'others fell in!" "More to the right, little 'un!" "Sakes! She's past that, anyway." "Ah! she's by the edge of the water." "It's a hundred to one she'll be in!" These and a score of other exclamations broke from the



excited crowd of onlookers as they watched her progress.

"Bet she wayn't git thar!"

"I'll lay evens on her!"

"A hundred dollars she wayn't!"

"Done with yew!"

"She's thar! She is thar!" cried Jim gaily, and dancing with delight, "My saucy little Jenny!"

Her lantern was waving from left to right. She had reached the island, paying out cord as she went. A loud cheer broke from the crowd. The rope attached to the twine was being rapidly hauled over. The communication was effected.

A little later and the raft attached to the cord was launched. Jim Platt, with others manning the raft, were hauled over to the island.

There was an anxious interval during which the banks were thoroughly searched again for possible survivors. None were found.


After a while the waving of the lantern on the island signalled the return of the raft. It was hauled back hand over hand. Five men were saved. They sat huddled together on the raft; almost frozen together; sore to bleeding in their stiff and frozen clothes, injured for life by the rigours of the last two days, but tended

now by kindly hands and hearts that ached over their agonies.

"But whar's Saucy Jane?" cried Silas Jay, before the men were landed, for it was obvious she was not upon the raft.

"Oh, we've done her this time, 'ave we?" replied Jim with a grunt, as he shipped his paddle. "She started to skate back, the saucy puss! an' bet me a thousand dollars she'd land afore me. We've done 'er this time."

"'Ow no, you ain't!" exclaimed Saucy Jane from the shore. "You've jis' lorst bet, Jim darling. I've been back this minutes, an' helpin' with the rest of the here to haul you back. Now, let's git This ain't no place for wimmen," she said in her own cheeky manner, with a glance at Colonel Jay. "No, it certainly ain't no place for wimmen—especially brides."



THE END.









